

# THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

## CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. HATHERLEY'S REVENGE.

SIR JOHN HATHERLEY'S butler slept just under the library; Mark Hatherley just above it. The latter had been sitting up writing; the former was roused by the first noise of struggle in the library. He had risen in haste, when the crash further alarmed him. It also startled Mark. Both had seized a light. One ascended; the other descended; and now, profoundly astonished, both stood confronting the two frantic women.

"What on earth is the matter?" enquired Mark.

Gertrude, as pale as a sheet with anger, shrugged her shoulders scornfully, and remained silent.

"Look!" raved Mrs. Hatherley. "The receipt—for the Psalter—Richard Dallas—my Willie innocent! Lady Hatherley, I ——" She stopped, fairly choked with fury and asthma. She could speak no more, but with outstretched, shaking hands, with blazing eyes, and quivering form, still stood mutely denouncing.

"May I see?" said Mark, quietly, and approached Lady Hatherley. She still held the paper crushed in her hand; but now, at his request, relinquished it. He held it up to the light and read it, surprise not unmixed with sternness slowly gathering over his features as he did so.

"Will you come into the library?" he said, briefly. "You also, Aunt Laura. Rawlins, I think you need not wait." And Rawlins retired, as impassive as though he had been destiny incorporate, instead of a mere amazed spectator of it.

Mark led the way into the library and installed himself in an arm-chair.

"And now, will you explain what all this means?" he said quietly.

Thus admonished, Mrs. Hatherley started off instantaneously upon a rambling, excited statement of how she had followed Gertrude

downstairs, watched her proceedings at the bureau, and pounced upon her finally in the moment of her finding the receipt.

"My Willie was calumniated to shield the guilty. The receipt mentions Richard Dallas; therefore, the Psalter was sold by him. He was not the thief, but the thief's accomplice. He doubtless divided the spoils; and the instigator of his deed stands *there*." And she almost cast herself anew upon Gertrude. But Mark took her firmly by the two wrists and forced her quietly into a seat.

"Before making such statements, Aunt Laura, you should be prepared with proofs," he said, with stern rebuke.

"Proofs?" shrieked Mrs. Hatherley. "The proof lies in that paper. No doubt one day her husband, or somebody else, surprised her with the receipt in her hand; she thrust it into the bureau, and now, like a thief in the night, has crept down to regain possession of it."

Then, for the first time Gertrude broke silence.

"I found the receipt by accident in a secret drawer of which I had never before discovered the existence. I was dumbfounded when I saw it."

She spoke with contemptuous calm, and pointed towards the open bureau. Mark turned to look at it. There, indeed, gaped a small receptacle which was as new to him as to anybody.

"Do you not think it much more likely that my father himself put the receipt in that hiding-place? Very probably he alone knew of such a drawer," he said, still quietly addressing his aunt.

"Then he had discovered the theft and sought to shield her," panted Mrs. Hatherley.

She was exasperated at Mark's calm. Could he also intend to take part with the enemy? Was her prey after all to escape her? At the bare idea she began to sob hysterically. Mark rose to put an end to the scene. He did not understand the affair of the receipt, nor very earnestly wish to understand it. He had many vague floating suspicions, but one recurred more frequently and grew every moment more coherent than all the rest. In any case, however, the business concerned his father more than himself, and he wished to have as little to do with it as possible. When Mrs. Hatherley saw him deliberately locking up the bureau and preparing to depart, her angry consternation knew no bounds. Was nothing to be done to that woman, standing there in her insolent calm and galling beauty? Were no questions to be asked of her; no humiliation apportioned; no punishment inflicted? Half goaded to madness, she turned upon her savagely.

"You do not speak because you dare not," she cried. "If you were one whit less cunning or less shameless, you would seek by some falsehood to explain your presence here to-night."

"I came to seek for a paper," answered Gertrude, haughtily. "Not the one you think, for I did not know of its existence. I

waited till my husband was asleep, and abstracted the keys from beneath his pillow. I shall explain nothing; extenuate nothing; far less shall I deny. My act was mean—it was not criminal. You may blazon it for your satisfaction over Elmsleigh to-morrow." And with one parting, defiant glance, she swept from the room.

"When I think ——" began Mrs. Hatherley.

"Think nothing," Mark interrupted curtly. "I am going back to my room. I do not know what you intend to do, Aunt Laura, but I should advise you to follow my example." He paused for an instant; but as no answer came from her petrified lips, he coolly deposited the lamp upon the table for her, and wended his own way upstairs through the first faint glimmer of the dawn.

Mrs. Hatherley stood rooted to the ground. Then as all her disappointment, all her baffled rage, her foiled revenge, her useless craft and wasted patience swept over her in a flood of recollection, she clasped her hands above her head and sent a cry into the lonely stillness that was like the shriek of some wild, wounded animal. She staggered backwards, clutched vainly at the table for support, and fell in a heap to the ground. There the excellent Rawlins, fated to have little slumber that night, found her in a profound, faint. And thence, thinking that Pandemonium was let loose upon the family, he conveyed her to her bedroom, and summoned a maid to her assistance. Florence was also roused; Mark got little more rest; a doctor was sent for, and the whole household was soon astir. Only Sir John still slept on, until at last his stertorous breathing drew the attention of his startled wife. Then Dr. Hervey was summoned from Mrs. Hatherley's bedside and brought into his room.

And when all Elmsleigh sat down to breakfast that morning, it was regaled through the newspapers with one piece of news, and through the peripatetic baker and butcher-boys with another. The first was that the Aztec Mine Company had fraudulently collapsed. The other was that Sir John Hatherley had had a paralytic seizure in the night and was not going to recover.

This, however, turned out to be a mistake. A seizure he had indeed had, but not a severe one. In fact, his consciousness soon returned, and he did the greatest honour to Dr. Hervey's remedies. But he was ordered unbroken quiet, and lay in a darkened chamber throughout the long hours of the day: while in the city, maddened speculators were cursing his name, and the women and children whom he had ruined were staring hunger in the face.

For the next two or three days, all the brunt of the disaster and all the shame of it fell upon Mark. He went about, very stern and pale; seeking counsel from few and comfort from none. They were very bitter hours for him; but since the blow was inevitable he was relieved that it had fallen. And some small solace he found in the reflection that his hands at last were free to act as he thought fittest.

Late in the afternoon of the day following the eventful night, Gertrude met Mark in the corridor. For more than twelve hours they had hardly exchanged a word, but now she stopped him.

"I telegraphed this morning to my brother, Richard Dallas, to ask for an explanation of that receipt," she said. "I have had no answer. I suppose it will come soon."

"I dare say it will," Mark answered kindly rather than otherwise, for he was struck with her pallor and exhausted air.

"I had nothing to do with the missing Psalter," Lady Hatherley added, after a pause. After all, it was this which she most wished to say to him, for her pride had been humiliated by his discovery of her clandestine visit to the library, and from unjust suspicion she at least wished to free herself in his eyes.

"I never thought you had anything to do with it," Mark replied, gravely. "Have you heard the news? Do you know that if my father is not ruined, he should be?"

"I am almost glad," said Gertrude.

"Glad?"

"Yes, glad. Some things which look like punishment come as a release from bondage, you know," she answered, quietly; then, almost before he knew it, had left his side. She was truer, perhaps, in these moments than she had ever been in all her life. What was most womanly in her was touched by Sir John's helpless condition; what was most practical was called forth by the need of tending him. Moreover, her brain, ever busy, had already outstripped the sordid present and was hastening towards the changed life beyond. She would quit Elmsleigh and the people who irritated and bored her. And though there might be discomfort to endure, it would be discomfort mixed with novelty; and to Gertrude it always seemed as though change were the one thing necessary for freeing her imprisoned spirit.

Meanwhile rumour was extremely busy with her name. Mrs. Hatherley had not been silent; and the butler, though grave as a court chamberlain upstairs, had not been able to resist the temptation of taking his fellow-servants into his confidence. Mrs. Hatherley had never been above such small arts as ingratiate domestics, and she was far more popular in the servants'-hall than the disdainful young mistress. Public opinion, with its queer logic, thought much less ill of her for spying at Gertrude's actions, than with Gertrude for rummaging among her husband's drawers. A garbled account of the scene in the library, mixed with a still more imperfect report of some letter addressed to Lady Hatherley, got abroad, and, while blackening Gertrude, it exalted Mrs. Hatherley. The latter and Florence found themselves almost as popular as in the halcyon days succeeding the news of Sir John's engagement. Day after day they set out upon a sociable round of visits; and wherever they appeared were welcome. Most fervent among their partisans was Mrs. Burton.



"When I think," said that virtuous and perspicacious lady, "when I think of how I ever mistrusted Sir John, I am really almost tempted to pronounce myself inspired."

"We are fortunate in the possession in our midst of so much infallibility," remarked someone; but it was only a brute of a man.

"I am not clever," continued Mrs. Burton; "and I have often regretted it; although I must own that with the present dreadful notions prevailing among intellectual people everywhere, I feel inclined to place the *heart* above the *head*. But as I was saying, I am not clever."

"La!" cried Flossie. "When you first came here you said there was not a creature fit to exchange an idea with."

"You sweet, impertinent pet," replied Mrs. Burton, fondly. "I think you *must* have misunderstood me. One of the reasons why I finally made up my mind to separate from my darling daughter and marry Mr. Burton was, because I felt that, with my deficiencies, the thing I was best fitted for was parish work. There I could be guided and instructed. There, working under a superior intellect, I could be *useful*."

It is to be presumed that the idea of Mr. Burton's superior intellect was so new as to strike everybody dumb with surprise. For after looking sweetly round the circle for an answer and receiving none, Mrs. Burton continued:

"No. I have few gifts. We cannot all be talented; and talent is often a snare. But if there be one thing in which I think I may claim some small power, it is in the divination of character. Even this I should hardly venture to say of myself, only that I have been sometimes told it."

"I shouldn't have said you were penetrating," drawled Mrs. Hatherley, with her best air of stupidity.

"No?" said Mrs. Burton, and put her golden head on one side, like a bird contemplating a worm. "No? That is what Mr. Burton often says. I look so innocent, he tells me. But you must all take care; I am deeper than I seem. And from the very first moment I saw through Sir John; through him, and through that shameless girl, Gertrude Dallas."

Mrs. Burton was fortunate in her subject. Gertrude was now so thoroughly detested that people were anxious to abuse her. And this anxiety left nobody leisure to be critical. Consequently Mrs. Burton's statements about her own insight passed unchallenged, and the tide of gossip flowed on.

While Elmsleigh talked, and Sir John grew slowly better, and the law wove its toils about him, and even sent down its agents to The Limes there to await his recovery, Mark was making one discovery after another. To the proud young man, a little stern hitherto in his own unstained integrity, such disgrace as awaited him, and even now made itself apparent in his father's ruin, was hard enough to

bear. But what rendered the burden of it almost intolerable was to find how deliberately planned and steadily carried out had been Sir John's deception of his family and the world. And the meanness of the modes employed by him was only equalled by the sordidness of the ends pursued.

"To play with loaded dice for such a stake!" was often Mark's reflection, on finding that constantly Sir John had sacrificed some scheme of financial success to the paltry theatricism of his social life. He had made one or two good coups; had one or two strokes of luck, and for a certain number of years had been rich indeed. But a corroding spirit of indolence was in him; and an empty vanity that made him cling to shows and gewgaws. In a word, he had one of the natures which a public admiration intoxicates, without the energy to play even momentarily an exalted part. Everything about him, as Mark bit by bit discovered, was tinsel, sham, pretence. To stay the increasing clamour of his creditors, and blind the world to the final proof of his insolvency, there had been no craft which he had not resorted to. The very money for his marriage he had obtained by the secret sale of his plate; and the diamonds—the famous diamonds—which he had bestowed upon his bride were paste! A masquerade, so prolonged and so unworthy, propped up by such devices and maintained with a perseverance so insane, would have been ludicrous, if for Mark it had not been tragical.

"Your diamonds are false," said Mark to Gertrude, on returning the parure after having borrowed it to test them. Her eyes flashed with anger for a second. To know herself deluded even here was bitter.

"If they had been genuine, I should have asked you to surrender them," continued Mark, in a low tone. "They were bought at a time when all my father's money was due to those who had trusted him." He had trained himself to say these things calmly, but even yet a change in his voice showed how much the calmness cost him.

Gertrude was touched. She hesitated for a moment, the cynicism of years struggling in her with one of her impulses of generosity. Then, suddenly she snatched the rings from her fingers, the diamonds from her ears, and cast them in a glittering little heap on the table. These at least were real; it had been one of Sir John's devices to take care of that.

"Please sell them," she said, "and give the money to whom you please. It won't be much, but it is all I have." And before, surprised and a little pleased, he could find words to reject her sacrifice, she hastily left the room.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hatherley, meeting Gertrude five minutes later in the corridor. "What have you done with your earrings? And your rings too?"

"I have given them away," said Gertrude, contemptuously.

"Given them away. Nonsense!" Mrs. Hatherley looked extremely incredulous.

"It is quite true, I assure you," retorted Lady Hatherley, insolently. "I generally tell you the truth. There are people who are not worth the intellectual effort implied in a plausible lie."

Gertrude's tongue was a scorpion-whip in these days to Mrs. Hatherley. She did not often speak to her, but when she did every word cut like a lash. The creole quivered with mortification as much as resentment.

"Your brother has never answered your telegram, I believe?" she called after her enemy, by way of a Parthian shot.

Gertrude merely shrugged her shoulders and went on her way. It was quite true that Dick had not telegraphed, although her own message had been sent two days ago. The explanation of the sold Psalter had become so obvious since that she had hardly reflected on her brother's silence; but now she came to think of it, she did find it strange, and she resolved to write to Paris on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### IN THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT.

ABOUT half an hour later on the same afternoon, Flossie, her small bright eyes, like black beads, sparkling with excitement, bounded upstairs, and burst panting into her mother's room.

"I thought I should never be released. He is only just gone," she said, graphically but incoherently, and subsided into the nearest chair.

"Released? From where? *Who* is only just gone?" asked Mrs. Hatherley, with impatience.

"Her visitor." The personal and possessive pronouns, anonymously used by the widow and her daughter, invariably meant Gertrude.

"Has she had a visitor?"

Flossie nodded portentously.

"A man, mamma! The man from Harwich."

"O—h!" If Harwich had been Broadmoor, Mrs. Hatherley could not have looked more scandalised—or gratified. "How do you know, Flossie?"

At this point Flossie showed some slight signs of embarrassment.

"Well, you see," she began, slowly, "I—I chanced to see him come. I was *going* into the garden—so—and of course I went. And I wanted to look at the Gloire de Dijon under the library window."

Here she paused. She was nothing but a little spy; and she knew it, and her mother knew it. But though education had not suppressed her natural proclivities, it had made her the least bit in the world ashamed of them.

"I see," said Mrs. Hatherley, carelessly. "And I suppose the window was open?"

"Yes. And so of course I could not help hearing *a little*."

"Of course not." Mrs. Hatherley's feet began to beat a small tattoo of impatience.

"But I did not hear much," continued Flossie, and looked this time, to do her justice, very frankly aggrieved. "Only a few words."

"And what were they?"

"He said: 'Look here, Gerty, you know I *must* have money. The journey from Harwich cleared me out. Can't you sell something—or give me even a ring?'"

"Go on." Mrs. Hatherley was sitting bolt upright now, from sheer excess of eagerness.

"That was all," said Flossie, dolorously. "She came and shut the window. I had only just time to hide myself; otherwise she would have said I was listening—spiteful thing!"

"Florence," exclaimed her mother, impressively, "the depth of depravity in that woman is a thing I never could have believed had I not seen it." She paused and looked so solemnly into Flossie's eyes that she brought tears of terrified excitement into them. "Do you know what she has done?"

"Oh, what?" Flossie nearly screamed. Had Gertrude murdered the man from Harwich and concealed his body beneath the library sofa?

"She has given him *all* her jewels," replied Mrs. Hatherley in a deep tone. "I chance to know it."

"Oh, my gracious!" exclaimed Flossie.

Now, this conclusion of Mrs. Hatherley's was really gratuitous, inasmuch as the interview in the library had obviously taken place after her own with Gertrude in the corridor. But to what conclusions will not the nimble female mind jump, when edged on by suspicion and inspired by spite? Mrs. Hatherley, ever since that delirious night in the library, had been suffering from pressure on the brain. Her jaundiced mind made her loftily disdainful of such futile particulars as dates and places. She had wanted to know why Gertrude had given away her trinkets. She had found a plausible explanation. It did not fit. But that was no matter. It was an explanation all the same, and a compromising one to the enemy.

That night when Gertrude went in as usual to see Sir John, she was struck with the change in him. He looked older, feebler, and more shrunken than had yet been the case throughout his illness.

"Are you not so well?" she asked him, gently enough.

He lifted his hand to his head. "It is the pain here—here," he said, impatiently. "I cannot sleep. The room seems full of shadows, full of noises. Send for Hervey. I must have chloral."

She rang the bell to give the order. "You will let the nurse sit up with you to-night?"

"I will have no nurse, said her husband, in a tone of irritation. He had taken a dislike to the woman and driven her away

an early stage in his illness, but she had remained in the house all the same. The recovery was not complete.

"Then I will stay with you," said Gertrude. She had a curious dislike to be alone with him, her overwrought nerves and deep aversion struggling constantly in her with a woman's sense of duty to the helpless. Nevertheless, she would sit up with him if nobody else did.

"Yes, stay, child. It is not much to ask. You are sorry for me, are you not?" asked the old man. In truth he looked old now.

The suddenness of the question took her by surprise. It was the first time he had ever made any direct personal appeal of the sort to his wife. Generally his selfishness was too profound, his craft too cold to feel the need of sympathy. She stood silent, not knowing what to answer. Did she feel sorry for it, this grey head laid low in weakness and branded with disgrace? In such an unlovely old age lie few elements of pathos, unless it be the pathos of Nature's eternal irony.

Her silence struck him at last. Perhaps it made the loneliness of his empty heart seem greater. At any rate, he looked up and stretched out his shaking hand. "No answer, my dear? Are you glad, then, to see me thus?"

"Glad!" Gertrude echoed the word in a stifled voice. With a shudder as much of awe as repulsion, she forced herself to lay her own hand in his chill and feeble grasp. Her whole being was in revolt: nevertheless some unknown power, the majesty of a Presence, unseen, unheard, yet felt, drew her shrinking spirit forward to the verge of a great renunciation.

"I am old—and ill. You see that I am ill," he continued, with a strange eagerness. "I dare say I shall never be strong again, though I may live for years. I—I know what has happened——" here his grasp of her fingers tightened, and his voice sank to a slow whisper. "I have heard them talking, and I know I am ruined. But they will not touch me—not a poor old sick man like me. I shall be free—but I shall be lonely. Mark will go away. Those others also. But you will stay, my dear? You are young, you are strong. And I have never been unkind to you."

Gertrude only answered with a dumb, agonised sob. She felt a very vertigo of self-sacrifice draw her on to give the promise he required of her; yet she knew that when the time came her soul would be filled with revolt.

"If you desert me, you, my wife, who will be true to me? Not Mark. Listen, Gertrude; I will tell you something. I am afraid of Mark. Afraid, do you hear? He is so sternly honest. He does not understand. He will take everything from me, and leave me a poor man, destitute and lonely. Everybody will be unkind to me if you leave me," he continued, clutching at her dress now with his other hand. "No one will touch me when you are there. Promise,



Gertrude, promise! Remember that you have sworn to obey me."

"I promise," she said at last, putting her hand up to her throat the while, as though she drew her breath in pain.

"We will go away, then," he said, evidently pleased. "In a day or two, as soon as I am strong, we will start. Mark shall arrange everything for me here. I cannot be troubled. I am too weak. We will live somewhere quietly, with nobody to worry us. And I will not use you ill, my dear. I never have—have I?"

"No," she answered him mechanically, the only sense alive in her a feeling of dull torture. She sat there while he dropped again into uneasy slumber; and every minute, marked merely by the vibration of a soundless clock, seemed to strike like a hammer upon her throbbing brain. No sense of duty upheld her; for she had not yielded to any definite idea of right, but to a half hysterical pity for the old man's weakness. What was her life henceforth to be, chained by the fetters she herself had forged? This question returned again and again to her mind with a dreary iteration.

He woke again in half-an-hour or so, with a start. "Is Hervey not there? I cannot sleep. Will no one send for Hervey?"

"I have sent. He will soon be here. He was engaged," answered Gertrude.

Sir John turned continually from side to side. He was evidently suffering from that painful excitability of the brain when ideas present themselves only in fragments, and the mind is full of disconnected images.

"Chloral. I want chloral," he perpetually muttered; until at last Gertrude could stand it no longer, and rose to call Mark. She had hardly reached the door, when she met a servant, followed by Dr. Hervey.

"I am so glad you came. I could not have stayed there another minute," she said, with unwitting eagerness, her mind so overstrained that she was not even aware of being excited.

The Doctor looked at her in some surprise and pity, struck by her deadly paleness and the hunted expression of her eyes. "Is Sir John violent?" he asked hastily, and pressed forward without waiting for an answer. The idea of this possible new development of the malady had suddenly presented itself to him; and he was consequently a little astonished, as well as relieved, to find the patient lying there so quietly. But his professional glance grew grave as he noted the ceaseless, aimless movement of the feeble hands, and heard the rapid, eager tone, in which Sir John said, "Chloral, Hervey; I must have chloral. I cannot sleep."

Now, Dr. Hervey had a great objection to narcotics: it was one of his peculiarities. Consequently he stood silent and doubtful; and finally began to suggest something else.

"No, no; chloral I tell you. It is the only thing that agrees with me; the only thing I will take," reiterated Sir John.

"Well, only one dose then," replied the doctor, reluctantly. "In compliance with Lady Hatherley's message, and as it was already so late, I brought a bottle with me. It contains three doses, but you must only take one."

"All right, only one. Don't look so grave, Hervey. I am not a baby, nor so weak that a narcotic will kill me. Did I not sit up to-day? And even walk?"

"Humph!" said the doctor for all reply. He did not speak his secret thought. It was that Sir John's manner was much less calm than he liked. The very freedom of his address was so unlike his usual slightly pompous and dignified utterances.

However, since chloral alone would satisfy him, then chloral he must have. "But remember, only one dose, Lady Hatherley," said the doctor. "And if that fails to put him to sleep, which is likely enough in his present state; without my seeing him; you must not repeat it. Who is going to sit up with him?"

"I am," said Gertrude.

"You look anything but fit for it. Have you been much fatigued?"

"No," she answered, turning away, a little fretted by his questioning.

Dr. Hervey did not like short answers; moreover, in common with most people in Elmsleigh, he was prejudiced against Sir John's young wife. Wherefore "Rude!" was his mental comment on her manner.

"Lady Hatherley seems very much fatigued," he remarked a few minutes later in the corridor to a group composed of Mark, Mrs. Hatherley, and the rejected nurse. "Surely it would be better for Mrs. Wilson, here, to sit up to-night."

"My father does not wish it," replied Mark, with his quiet decision.

"We know why!" interpolated Mrs. Hatherley, with a slight toss of the head, promptly copied by Mrs. Wilson. The nurse and Mrs. Hatherley had become great allies, and the former was intimately convinced that an upstart minx like Lady Hatherley could alone have prejudiced Sir John against so estimable a person as herself.

Dr. Hervey's eyes, with a quick, inquisitive twinkle in them, travelled from one to the other. The widow and Mrs. Wilson looked unutterable things.

"What these women are!" said the doctor, on his way home, to himself, with all that proud consciousness of sagacity in regard to the fair sex which distinguishes a man who is himself habitually henpecked. "That good-looking young woman likes to do everything for the old fellow herself. Afraid of being cut out of his will? Shouldn't wonder. What they are! Crafty as the deuce where their own ends are concerned, and sieves for keeping other people's secrets. Lucky I never tell any of them anything."

Next morning at breakfast the worthy man of healing, perseveringly cross-questioned by his better-half, confided to her his views con-

cerning Lady Hatherley. "But of course you won't repeat what I say, Maria. It is not often I am so indiscreet."

"You need not remind me of the reserve with which you usually treat me," replied Mrs. Hervey, resentment lending majesty to her speech. "I am not aware that I ever repeated one of the few confidences which you have condescended to make me."

And within an hour she had casually mentioned to half a dozen people that the Doctor had the worst possible opinion of Lady Hatherley: who, of course with some ulterior object, would allow nobody to approach Sir John but herself.

An hour after the chloral had been administered, the sick man's restlessness had not diminished, but increased. Gertrude who had very little experience of illness, and the morbid sensitiveness to its manifestations of all excitable people, felt a longing that increased every moment in intensity to quiet this ceaseless movement of the hands, and still the low moaning. Always slightly predisposed to slight other people's opinions, she began to wonder if there were really any sense in Dr. Hervey's prohibition of the second dose. She presently heard Mark's voice in the adjoining sitting-room, where Mrs. Hatherley and the nurse were still in confidential conclave, and went in to ask his advice. Needless to say that it was emphatically in favour of obedience to the doctor. Gertrude looked disappointed.

"This restlessness must be much worse for him than anything else."

"I dare say it is a common symptom. Is it not, Mrs. Wilson?" continued Mark, appealing to the nurse.

"I have always understood, sir, that a doctor's orders must go before everything. But in this case I really must decline all responsibility," added that worthy woman.

Mark turned from her. "You had better not give the chloral, I think," he said to Gertrude.

"It's here, my lady; on that table yonder. I thought it best to bring it away when the doctor put it into my hand. But I can give it back to you, my lady, if you wish."

"What is the use of giving it back to me, when Sir John is not to take it?" answered Gertrude irritably, as she left the room.

Mark followed her. "You look very tired, Lady Hatherley. Could not I sit up the rest of the night?"

"No, no. Let me do it. I must, I must," she answered, clasping and unclasping her burning hands.

"I can lie down on the sofa here, my lady, so as to be easily called if you require me," interposed the nurse, standing in the doorway.

"I shall want nothing. And if I do, what is it to walk to the end of the corridor to rouse you?" replied Gertrude, hardly more amiably than before, for the woman's resentful obsequiousness annoyed her.

She went back into the bedroom and resumed her weary watch.

He was quieter now, she noticed, with relief; not the pathetic relief of love, indeed, but a thankfulness for the cessation of a painful phenomenon. She lay back in her arm-chair and raised her hands to her own throbbing temples. The pain there was intense; there was no fear of her sleeping with it, she thought. The minutes passed, made audible now by the loud ticking of the hall clock sounding through the hushed home. The shadows deepened in the large room, and the reflection of the night-light on the ceiling grew ruddier; a deeper darkness enwrapped the bed. Sir John was apparently asleep. To-morrow, said Gertrude to herself, he would probably be much better, and she smiled with a sad irony, thinking how many hearts the improvement, usually so joyfully hailed, would leave cold. She fell to musing. Her thoughts, released by the soothing silence from their tension, wandered aimlessly from one thing to another, from the past to the present. She had none of the carking anxiety which generally attends such watches as hers, and narrows every sense and feeling to one intense and sleepless flame-point of attention. Gradually, without noticing it, her muscles relaxed; the torpor succeeding to pain enveloped her brain. And she slumbered.

When she awoke again it was with a start, and a sense that some stir or summons had roused her. With some self-reproach, she started up. Had he called her?

The first faint glimmer of the dawn came through the closed shutters, and by it Gertrude dimly descried her husband lying partially crosswise, and with one hand on the table beside his bed. She rose and very gently moved him, as well as she could into an easier posture. His hand was a little cold, but not very. She covered it with the sheet. Then, noticing that a lock of his hair, that soft, beautiful, snow-white hair, that made him look like a bard, had fallen over his eyes she stroked it softly back. Involuntarily her fingers, moved by some tiny electrical wave of human sympathy, lingered for a second on the handsome but not noble brow. She was conscious, or fancied she was conscious, of some new solemnity in the picturesque head: doubtless it was the wan light that gave it.

Patiently she resumed her watch, shivering a little with the early chillness, and dreamily marking the dim procession of shadows on the walls called up by the growing brightness that struggled through every chink. They were rather ghostly, these shadows—to her fantastic imagination they were like a gathering of pallid visitants from Hades. After a while, they even struck her as uncanny. The sun must be fairly high in the heavens by now, she thought, hearing the sounds of awakened life through the house; and she longed for light and air, yet ventured not to stir, for fear of startling the sleeper.

Her foot accidentally struck an object on the carpet. It was hard, and she stooped to lift and to examine it. It was a small bottle: the

cork was out, the phial empty; and surely—yes, surely it smelt of chloral! Bewildered, she rose. Had not the nurse taken away the chloral? What had happened?

Sir John? He was very quiet—too quiet. She tremblingly laid her hand upon him; then drew back with a stifled cry. He was icy cold. Quick as thought, she flew to the nearest window and tore the shutters open. Then, with a shudder of dread, forced herself to turn and look. In the golden sunlight her husband's face was revealed to her, cold and grey. He was dead. So much she felt, though she had never before seen a corpse. Had he died while she slept? Had her carelessness killed him?

The very thought of all those hours passed unknowingly in the presence of Death, filled the excited woman with horror. She flew down the passage, calling: "Mark! Mark!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WAS IT CHLORAL?

MARK, already dressed, came hastily out of his bedroom; Mrs. Hatherley's head appeared discreetly at the door of hers; several servants hurried to the scene, for Gertrude's call had carried consternation.

"Your father," she cried. "Quick! He is dead. He took an overdose of chloral, I think. Oh! why did I sleep?" She really was nearly beside herself, and stood wringing her hands in the midst of them all, able to think of nothing clearly, and shaken with the horror of her discovery.

Mark went into the silent chamber; issued again, however, before a minute had passed, looking very grave, but calm. "He is indeed dead. Let somebody go immediately for Dr. Hervey," he said in low, steady tones; then stayed by the door with the downcast eyes and compressed lips of one whose thoughts are various and solemn.

Some natural grief he felt at this tragically sudden snapping of the familiar life. Some sorrowful awe had filled him at the sight of the rigid form, so well-known, still untouched by corruption, yet already so mysteriously changed. And inevitable as his awe and his grief, stronger than either, was that vain but pathetic regret of the living for the words that may nevermore be spoken. But Mark in these latter days had felt too keenly the disgrace that had fallen on his father's name, and feared too strongly the punishment which might await him, not to have a sense of relief at the thought that Death had stayed the hand of Justice and must still the voice of reproach. Ah, better so! Since the inexorable hour must sound for all, would that for all it might sound so mercifully!

Mark was roused from his musing by a touch upon his arm. His



aunt stood beside him, her eyes bright with their well-known glitter of unutterable thoughts.

"Did you hear what she said, Mark?"

"She? Who?" he asked, half bewildered.

"Who? Lady Hatherley." The creole pointed to the door of the sitting-room whither Gertrude had betaken herself. "She said her husband took an over-dose of chloral *while she slept*."

The emphasis with which these concluding words were spoken passed unheeded by Mark. He had grown indifferent to the widow's recent melodramatic ways. But her speech roused his interest. He entered the sitting-room; Mrs. Hatherley gliding after him, in her usual stealthy manner. Gertrude was sitting on a sofa, leaning back and with her hands crossed upon her knees in the attitude and with the look of a person whose mind is absorbed by one idea. She was outwardly much calmer than at first: but, questioned, began relating all she knew with a rapidity and concentrated eagerness that betrayed her real excitement.

"Do you think he drank the chloral while I slept?" she whispered, still pursued by that dreadful doubt.

"Perhaps he never drank it at all. You found the bottle on the floor. He may have swept it down with his hand," said Mark.

"Then what killed him?" asked Gertrude, quickly.

"Possibly a stroke. But there shall be a post-mortem examination if Dr. Hervey thinks that may be of use in the way of revelation," he answered, kindly. A thought of sad irony almost made him smile. Sir John had loved mystification. Was his final exit from the scene of his long comedy to be itself a riddle?

"I do not understand," began Mrs. Hatherley, slowly, "why the chloral bottle should have been by his bed at all. The nurse," she added more emphatically, "said she brought it away."

"True. In here." Mark started up and turned towards the table. There was indeed a bottle with a small quantity of a pale-coloured liquid in it, which was obviously *not* chloral.

"The stupid woman! she must have made a mistake," exclaimed Mark, addressing his aunt.

Mrs. Hatherley's eyelashes flicked. Presumably it was in assent, for further answer made she none. At this moment, Mrs. Wilson herself appeared; looking very portentous.

"What is this I hear, my lady?" she asked of Gertrude, with an air of judicial authority. The patient from whose presence she had been shut out, had died: did not such an occurrence invest herself with a kind of avenging majesty?

"Sir John is dead," Gertrude answered her; speaking simply, mechanically even, certainly not in the way in which, according to Mrs. Wilson's ideas, the widow of an hour should have answered.

The truth was, it never even occurred to Gertrude to feign any conventional sorrow. That particular kind of pretence was foreign

to her nature. Moreover it was the fact of the death and the mode of it which preoccupied her—preoccupied her morbidly; but not in any sense the loss to herself. How could she regret that which she had never loved?

"You seem to have committed a very strange act of carelessness last night, Mrs. Wilson," here observed Mark. "See here!" And he held up the bottle.

"What is that, sir?"

As Mark explained, Mrs. Wilson's cap-strings fluttered with the strength of her righteous but controlled indignation.

"I am not in the habit, sir, of making such mistakes. I do not think, sir, that I have ever been accused of such a thing before. I shall be very much surprised, sir, if you are able to prove that I did it now."

Mark suppressed an exclamation of impatience. "If you did not do it, who did?" he asked, in his brusque way.

"I do not know, sir, I am sure," replied Mrs. Wilson. "Perhaps somebody changed the bottle after I brought it in?"

Dr. Hervey was announced. He came in with his best air of professional concern; and seemed a little relieved at being able to put it away again on discovering that it was not greatly needed. Surely never had Death entered any house escorted by a more meagre chorus of woe. The highest pathos of the still figure lying in the next room there was the pathos of its unwept At Peace!

"He, poor fellow, seems to feel it the most of all," was Dr. Hervey's reflection while listening to Mark's story.

But at the mention of the chloral he forgot everything but his own indignation at his orders being disobeyed.

"Did I not say he was only to have one dose?" cried the doctor.

"If he took another it was while Lady Hatherley was asleep," said Mark.

"Asleep? Asleep! Nurses should not sleep," sharply commented Dr. Hervey, too much excited to weigh his words.

"At least if they do sleep, they are not generally considered very efficient," remarked Mrs. Wilson, addressing the observation to space.

Gertrude turned upon her angrily. "Good heavens! Do you suppose I slept on purpose?"

"I don't know, my lady, I am sure," replied Mrs. Wilson, respectfully.

"I will not be insulted," flamed out Gertrude, unwisely angry, as was her wont. "What do you mean, woman?"

"Is this a time to wrangle? Can no one talk common sense?" interposed Mark, distributing blame with manlike impartiality.

Gertrude rose and swept out of the room. She was outraged by insane suspicions, and even Mark would not defend her! Mrs. Hatherley and Mrs. Wilson exchanged a significant glance. Mark meanwhile led Dr. Hervey into the silent room.

"Was this just how you found him?"

"Yes. He has not been touched."

They spoke in whispers, and as little as possible. Dr. Hervey took up the empty bottle, looked at the label; shook his head. The dead man's face told no tales of how he met his end. If the mute chloral bottle were not a witness, then there was no other.

"Inconceivable carelessness! This comes, you see, of amateur nursing."

Mark made no answer, for he was not disposed to talk in that room. As his companion turned to leave, he lingered behind an instant to draw the sheet over the set face. Unlike most countenances which gain in majesty beneath the seal of Death, Sir John's had lost a great part of its beauty. An unconquerable meanness sat upon his brow.

When Mark returned to the sitting-room he found Dr. Hervey talking to the attentive Mrs. Hatherley and the nurse. "Short of a post-mortem examination," he was saying, "it must be impossible to know the truth."

"I wish for a post-mortem examination," observed Mark. "Can you perform it immediately?"

"Not before five o'clock. By-the-bye, Mrs. Wilson, it has just struck me that I put the chloral bottle into your hands last night after measuring the dose?"

"So you did, sir," answered the nurse, her looks fraught with unfathomable meaning.

"I did? Then why did you not take it away with you?"

"I took it away, sir. I laid it on that table." And Mrs. Wilson pointed to the other side of the room.

Dr. Hervey glanced at the spot indicated; saw the other bottle there, crossed the room and fetched it. "Why, this is lavender water."

"There was no lavender water there last night, sir."

"You mean, before you brought in what you supposed to be the chloral? Of course not. You clearly brought away the one for the other," remarked Dr. Hervey, waxing impatient at her Sybilline air.

"I don't think I did, sir," said the nurse, looking intensely aggrieved.

"It would be a very unusual mistake for a person of experience to make!" observed Mrs. Hatherley, impressively.

"May I ask you both to be so good as explain your meaning?" requested Dr. Hervey. He was a testy man, and riddles irritated him. Mark had been called out of the room by a servant; consequently he could not choke the enigma in its birth, as he would otherwise surely have done.

"Mean? Why, we don't mean anything, Doctor."

"Nothing whatever, sir, I am sure."

Mrs. Hatherley's eyes were rolling like a magician's; Mrs. Wilson's

were fixed demurely on the ground; Dr. Hervey's travelled from one to the other with growing exasperation.

"This is nonsense. Either you mean, Mrs. Wilson, that you did or you did *not* mistake one for another."

"I did not mistake it, sir. I believe I am not in the habit of doing such things. I brought away the chloral, sir, just as you gave it to me."

"In the name of patience then, my good woman, how do you account for the lavender water being there now?" And Dr. Hervey pointed to the table.

"I don't account for it, sir. The lavender water was in the bedroom last night."

"Then I suppose you mean me to infer that somebody else made the mistake?" said the doctor, after a reflective stare. A thin streak of insinuation, not to be called a smile, illumined the decorous impassiveness of Nurse Wilson's countenance.

"Why, yes, sir, if any mistake was made," she said, in a slightly dreamy way, as though her attention were principally absorbed by the pattern of the wall-paper, to which she had now transferred her attention.

"Any mistake?—Why, bless the woman! What—ah? To be sure," said Dr. Hervey, stumbling across an idea and picking it up briskly. "You *did* say, just now, that you brought the chloral in here yourself. And now you say *you* made no mistake. Am I to understand that somebody else changed the bottles after you went to bed?"

"Of course you are to," said Mrs. Hatherley, with so unusual an animation that her hearer looked as much surprised as if his umbrella handle had spoken. The nurse was still sadly musing.

"Then *who* changed the bottles?"

"I don't know, sir, I am sure," replied the nurse, for the third time within an hour.

Dr. Hervey's eyes sought Mrs. Hatherley's. "Who changed them?" She shivered a little, like a cat when it first detects a mouse.

"Who was likely to do it?"

"Lady Hatherley sat up ——" Dr. Hervey paused in his speech; then anew burst out. "Do you think it was she?"

"Do you?" asked Mrs. Hatherley, gently.

A fresh silence, during which Nurse Wilson might have been a nun counting her beads. Mrs. Hatherley drew up her shawls and looked round for a fancied draught.

"Humph!" said the doctor. He rammed his hat over his brows, and stalked into the corridor; where he came across Mark. "If you don't stop the mouths of those two women, my dear fellow, there will be a rumpus of some sort, I can tell you. They insinuate that Lady Hatherley gave your father that second dose. She may have done it, of course; worn out by his importunity. I should take an early

occasion of learning the truth from her. That is, if the truth *can* be learnt from a woman."

"But she led me to suppose that he must have taken it, if at all, while she slept," said Mark.

"Well, go and question that pair in there. What women are!" repeated the doctor, as he went downstairs.

Very indignant, Mark walked into the sitting-room. "What is this I hear?" he began. "That you are insinuating things against Lady Hatherley—for which you can have no proof?"

"I, Mark?"

"I, sir?"

Astonished innocence was painted on both their countenances.

"You. Or you. It matters very little who said it, if it were once said by one of you and even tacitly confirmed by the other," Mark continued, severely. "You all heard what Lady Hatherley said this morning in the first outburst of her horror at finding my father dead. You have no right to attribute untruths to her even in your own minds; far less to give utterance to base suspicions. Remember that if I hear another word of this, I shall be extremely angry."

And thinking, poor fellow! like many a man before him, that such a threat must be thoroughly efficacious, Mark left them, and in five minutes had forgotten their insinuations.

All through the morning and afternoon people came to leave cards, and many of them were admitted to the darkened chamber where Mrs. Hatherley and Florence sat, exchanging exciting whispers in the semi-obscurity.

"How did it happen?" enquired Mrs. Burton, brimming over with the sympathy to which curiosity lends its keenest edge.

"Ah!" responded Mrs. Hatherley, and rolled her eyes.

Mrs. Burton edged a little closer. "Why, you don't mean to say ——? Dear me! Is there any mystery?"

"Mystery? The thing is *wrapped* in mystery," replied the widow, and expressively wrapped herself tighter in her shawl.

Mrs. Burton's pretty face, with its fringe of golden baby curls, was a study, all its features growing sharp with astonished new-born interest. "Do tell me," she said, coaxingly.

"No." Mrs. Hatherley firmly shook her head. "I have suffered, but I will be silent. Silent at all costs."

"Mamma!" ejaculated Flossie, a little alarmed at this unusual heroism.

"You might trust me," urged Mrs. Burton. "Am I not your friend, dearest Mrs. Hatherley? You know I would rather cut out my tongue than betray you."

Apparently this Spartan declaration had a slight effect. "Well—ask Mrs. Wilson what *she* thinks," said Mrs. Hatherley, playing carelessly with her fringes, and glancing at her visitor out of the corner of her eyes.



"But I don't know Mrs. Wilson, and she is only a nurse. And she isn't here. I think you might be kinder," added Mrs. Burton, looking a little inclined to pout.

"You promise not to tell—not to repeat what I say?"

"Yes."

This question and answer were exchanged in a rapid whisper, and now the widow and the Vicar's wife were sitting almost with the tips of their noses touching, and the black eyes seeming as if they were going to change places with the blue.

"It was—an overdose ——"

"Oh! I feel quite faint.—Of what?"

"Of chloral!"

"Goodness me! But then there is no mystery in it?"

"Isn't there!"

"Oh, do tell me, dear Mrs. Hatherley."

"The bottles were changed in the dead of the night," came the next creeping whisper.

Mrs. Burton shivered. "The dead of the night" fell with quite an uncanny effect upon her quivering nerves. "But who changed them?" she asked after a pause.

"That is the point," said Mrs. Hatherley.

"Dr. Hervey says it was Lady Hatherley," mercifully interposed Flossie, feeling quite sorry for Mrs. Burton. For she was a good-natured little thing at times, was Flossie.

"Exactly what I always thought," exclaimed Mrs. Burton triumphantly.

"Flossie, I did not say he *said* so, but only that he suggested it," remarked Mrs. Hatherley, reproving her daughter in haste.

"Oh! it doesn't matter. The secret is safe with me. I am as silent as the grave. Nobody ever accused me of tale-bearing. And of scandal I have a horror." Mrs. Burton stopped: and then went on again. "But to think of her being so soon unmasked. I always mistrusted her—always. There is something so false in her eyes. Well, good-bye, dear Mrs. Hatherley. Good-bye, my pet. You must come and spend a long day with me. I am sorry I cannot stay now, but I am *so* busy. Mr. Burton is a very hard task-master. But I don't complain. In such a wicked world, one is glad even of one's rare and few opportunities of doing good."

And with this pious reflection, Mrs. Burton embraced her dear friends fondly, tripped downstairs with a soft foot-fall, and on the doorstep met Mrs. Hervey.

"So I hear Dr. Hervey says that Lady Hatherley gave Sir John an overdose of chloral," were the first words she uttered.

"I think it very unlikely that Dr. Hervey would have committed himself to any such assertion," was Mrs. Hervey's stiff reply.

"Of course you won't admit it in so many words. But you know it is true and so do I," retorted Mrs. Burton, fascinatingly: and continued

her way. To the next person she met, she said : " Do you know that Sir John died of chloral given to him by Lady Hatherley ? By mistake ? Well, one must hope so. Dr. Hervey says there is no doubt about the fact. I have just met his wife, and she doesn't deny it."

The person favoured with this astounding piece of news, in her turn met a friend to whom, being prudent, she said simply : " Sir John, I hear on good authority, died of poison ; administered, it is hoped, by mistake."

Subsequently, the " poison " made a starting-point from which the report re-evolved itself into shapes of surprising complexity and novelty. Public curiosity became highly whetted. Everybody ran about to and from everybody else's house, talking, interrogating, contradicting, commenting, surmising. Some people who loved a mystery inclined to think that the poison had been given by an unknown hand. But they were in the minority, and most persons preferred to lay the blame on Gertrude. These again were divided into two camps ; those who held that she had given it by mistake, and those who longed to say, but did not dare, that she had administered it on purpose.

While the storm raged, and gathered hourly in strength the longer it lasted, the unconscious woman over whose head it was brewing remained in her deserted chamber, a prey to the dumb fury of her own humiliated and baffled spirit.

To the formless horror caused in Gertrude's mind by the suddenness of her husband's death—had succeeded a rush of characteristic, unreasoning rage. To what had all her scheming brought her ? Simply to an unpitied widowhood, ruined in purse, and now likely to be dishonoured in name. No remorse filled her at the reflection, but merely an extreme exasperation. She had played a losing game with fortune, and now the hour of her defeat had come. This was the point of view from which she looked at it, draping her thought, as always, somewhat melodramatically. Of course she thought herself a victim, and blamed Sir John, Mrs. Hatherley, Mark, her own people—everybody but herself.

She lay on her bed in the reckless abandonment of her angry idleness. What was she to do ? " Work " would have suggested energy ; but Gertrude had no real energy, only occasional spasmodic impulses. She recoiled from the bare notion of exertion. Not that she would have admitted it—to anybody but herself, and not often even unto herself. But in this hour of isolation and despair, she did own to her own soul that she was a craven. Lying there in her gorgeous beauty and her splendid strength, she felt her heart cower within her at the idea of facing the world again, and especially in hardship and struggle. But the sense of her own weakness, instead of making her humbler, only provoked a fresh explosion of violence. The world was senseless ; she herself was cast amid idiots and dastards and windlers, and that and nothing else was the reason why she would go down to her grave a pauper.

The hours wore on. All at once it struck her that nobody had come near her. She was too hysterical to be hungry, and she did not want anything, but such neglect was not to be borne. She rose to her feet; rang the bell imperiously; and turned angrily to the maid who answered it.

"Why has no luncheon been brought to me?"

"You did not order it, my lady."

Something off-hand in the girl's manner increased Gertrude's anger. "Bring some cold meat immediately. Or stay—no. Give me my bonnet. I shall go out."

"Go out, my lady?" The maid nearly fainted. No widow of six hours' standing had ever gone walking in *her* decorous experience.

"What are you staring at, may I ask?" enquired Gertrude, with a flashing glance.

The maid paused. "I beg your pardon, my lady, but your bonnet's trimmed with *red*."

This shaft told. Gertrude all at once remembered that she was going to commit a glaring act of bad taste. She hesitated an instant, some remaining conventionality in her struggling with an insane desire to hurl her contempt in the teeth of Elmsleigh. Then, making up her mind, with trembling fingers and a face of set defiance she tied on her bonnet, fastened her mantle, and asked for her gloves.

"If anybody enquires for me, you can say I am gone for a walk," she said to the maid: who was too scandalised to make any reply.

Gertrude turned, and swept downstairs like an empress. Several of the servants saw her, and stood rooted along the passage with amazement. Flossie gaped at her over the banisters and telegraphed to Mrs. Wilson to look also. Mrs. Wilson later averred that at the sight of such iniquity, her blood had curdled in her veins. But Gertrude held on her way undaunted; she was thoroughly natural, thoroughly herself for the first time since she had entered the once coveted, now hated house.

She walked slowly down the avenue of sweet-scented and rustling limes; then out into the road and past the rows of houses, whose inhabitants appeared at the windows to stare at her. She reached the common, and there was accosted by a respectably-dressed man, with a greyish beard, who said he had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. She drew out her purse, and emptied its contents, a few shillings, into his hand. She had no motive in doing this beyond a confused, perverse sense of general sympathy with those whom society rejects.

Her walk ended, she returned home. In the hall of The Limes, on entering, she found a group, composed of Dr. Hervey, Mark, Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie, and Mr. Burton. The butler and footman were also hovering about, preparing afternoon tea, for the hall was used as a kind of general sitting-room. As Gertrude advanced, everybody looked at her with hostile curiosity, mixed with such other

feelings as their various relations to her suggested. But Mark alone spoke, and it was in a tone of cold displeasure.

"You have been out, Lady Hatherley?"

"Yes. For a short walk. Why not?"

She met his glance defiantly enough, but already her courage began to fail her. Mark alone of all her world believed in her: what if he too should fall away. She was young and lonely enough to feel a stab of real pain at the thought.

"Why not?" repeated Mark. "I regret it," he said, icily.

She turned to the tea-table. "I am sorry if you think it wrong, but I really could bear the house no longer. I felt as if it were haunted."

"So it is," said Mrs. Hatherley, slowly. "Haunted with a mystery."

"A mystery?" Gertrude, holding a cup half-way to her mouth, repeated the word curiously.

"Dr. Hervey has just been telling us that the post-mortem examination has not revealed to him the true cause of my brother-in-law's—of your *husband's* death."

"What's that?" interposed Dr. Hervey, breaking off quickly in his conversation with Mr. Burton at the sound of his own name.—"Oh! the post-mortem.—Yes, indeed.—I wish the result had been clearer."

He was really only thinking of the medical aspect of the thing, but Mrs. Hatherley's eyes glittered with malignant exultation. Gertrude saw it; she noted, too, that the expression was reflected on Flossie's face; she detected it even in the demure inquisitiveness of the servants' glances; she fancied that from some suspicion akin to it even Mark's gravity was not free. What did they suspect in her? And she drank her tea in silence, although she was half-choked with indignation.

But what made her tremble, more than the anger, was the knowledge that her heart had sunk within her, chilled, for all its innocence, beneath the touch of Fear.

(To be continued.)



## HAP AND MISHAP.

By C. J. LANGSTON.

NOTHING seems more simple than to conduct the services, as by law established, in a country church without mistake or mishap; and yet I can truly say that considerable care and foresight may be necessary when a clergyman undertakes Sunday duty for another. And as this periodical is often to be found at the Parsonage, may I venture to give the result of my own experience and observation, together with certain useful hints and cautions to my clerical readers; whilst the following anecdotes may at the same time amuse my brethren of the laity.

To begin with vestments.

Beyond a stole and a hood it is not customary for a locum tenens to take anything to a fresh church. How often have I had reason to regret that I had not brought full canonicals? I was taking duty, for the first time, for a venerable clergyman well-known for ultra-evangelical principles, and a strict adherence to the Geneva gown in the pulpit. The prayers being over, the aged clerk had given out a fair measure of Tate and Brady, as in the good old times; and stopped to start the tune. Returning to the vestry, I prepared to put on the gown usually kept in a spacious cupboard. Oh, horror! the door was fastened beyond all the powers of Maskelyne and Cooke. I looked in vain for the key. I tried persuasion with a penknife and a half-penny in the chinks. There was no response to my "open, Sesame." Time pressed; even Tate and Brady waned. The clerk came up the chancel prolonging the refrain of the last verse. What could I do? I could not explain that their dear rector had taken the key on a holiday trip. I delivered the sermon in a surplice. The people were shocked: some thought I was a wolf in sheep's clothing; others a Puseyite.

To find no vestments at all is a worse predicament. Last year I arrived at a neighbouring church, as usual, ten minutes before service. Waiting in a fireless vestry only large enough to squeeze in two doors and two windows, I thought: "Ah, they are keeping the surplice in a dry place, to be brought presently." The bell stops. Enter clerk. "Surplice, sir? why it must be forgot." He ran to the Rectory: searched "upstairs, downstairs, in my lady's chamber." Meanwhile, I was on thorns. Time up, and I *never* a moment late. The voluntary ceases; people look at each other; some whisper, "To be or not to be?" Must I enter the reading-desk habited in a frock coat. Another moment and I should have been in all the local papers—to say nothing of the *Church Times*. I tremble to think of it;—but the surplice came, and appearances were saved.

To those who do not wear a cassock the surplice itself is often a



perplexity. I have sometimes had to wear a surplice seemingly no longer than a lady's apron; not to mention modern drapery of a severely simple form, in which it is designedly impossible to get at one's handkerchief, or at a coin for the offertory. My friend D——, a particularly short man, although he does not realise the fact, put on the surplice of a tall incumbent. Holding it bunched up in each hand, he walked sedately down the middle aisle, behind the silver-stick in waiting—the observed of all observers. I watched his perilous ascent of the chancel steps with anxiety. There was a fumbling and stumbling; and, presently, swathed and helpless, he rolled back like Lord Rolle at the Queen's coronation.

D——'s face and figure were surely intended for comedy. Methinks I see him now, walking down High Street in his morning costume: a dress coat with long tails, huge upturned collar with tie nine inches by three, large worsted gloves, a tall hat stuck at the back of his head, and a bulky gingham under his arm; the veritable image of Paul Pry, and "I hope I don't intrude."

All innocent of harm, he dreamt not of the waggery of artful boys as he wended his way, a stranger, towards the church where he was to officiate. He was cautious withal; and when he had walked more than the expected distance, waited at four cross-roads until reassured by an intelligent youngster, whom he rewarded with threepence, that to keep straight on, "summut over a moile," would bring him to R——. "Is *that* the church?" said my friend, pointing to a tower on the next hill. "That's him right enough," was the reply.

The bells were chiming as D——, almost melted with the heat, took his seat in the vestry, and waited to be robed. Presently, rather a dignified gentleman entered. "Clerk, will you please to fasten these bands," exclaimed D.

"Really, sir," said the gentleman, smiling, "I have not the pleasure of ——"

"Oh! I am come to take duty for Mr. S——."

"Why, Mr. S—— is the Rector of R——."

"Yes; and is not this R—— church?"

"No, my good sir; this is N——. R—— church is three miles in another direction."

Poor D——! how he blessed that intelligent youngster as he rushed over hedge and ditch to keep his appointment. He could hear the two refractory bells, clamorous for his presence, shouting "Be quick, be quick!" as he scrambled over the last stile, half an hour late. The people were leaving: he waved them back with his umbrella; he could not speak. At last he managed to gasp, "I will explain after service."

Very trying is it to a neat man to find a soiled or dilapidated surplice. At a secluded church in Leicestershire, I well remember a heavy garment, with many folds, having a huge collar like a bed-gown: and so often mended as to be a "thing of shreds and patches."

As it hung across the communion rails in front of a stove to dry, steaming from six days' dampness, I discovered that it was buttonless. But the clerk was equal to the emergency. Seeing, as I adjusted the elegant robe in the midst of a dozen school-children, actively engaged in crunching lollipops, that there would be a wide parting in front, he stealthily moved to a high pew, where sat the churchwarden's wife. The lady's head disappeared; there was a too-audible whisper. My friend returned beaming, and secured the erratic collar with a hair-pin!

Mistakes often arise from the common practice of trusting alone to figures in writing down the hymns. The caligraphy of the clergy is none of the clearest; and the remark by dear old Sydney Smith (a sorry *speller*, by the way) of a correspondent, that his letters resembled the gyrations of a bluebottle fly after taking a header in the inkstand, applies to many of my acquaintance. When, however, the clergyman's wife, who usually presides at the instrument, issues these paper slips, they are apt to puzzle the most wary. A lady's figures, such as the 3 and 5, the 7 and 9, are generally so similar as to get "completely mixed," like the Siamese twins: erasures and re-insertions are frequent; and the numbers are sometimes written down when the hymn-book is closed and out of sight. Therefore we are not surprised when the minister gives out one hymn and the choir sings another; or when the announcement is followed by an awkward pause.

I have known instances where the singing after the third collect depended upon eventuality. In a church in Kent, after service had commenced, the following hurriedly-written notice was passed to me: "If James Standen and Ellen Shorter come, there will be a hanthem; if not, him no go."

I must admit that I felt rather anxious, when late-comers caused the venerable door to groan in rebuke, whether the missing vocalists would steer towards the choir-seats; but there was no arrival there, and therefore I passed on to the other prayers. Yet I had some misgiving upon hearing the rustle of garments, and seeing at a glance that the congregation were reaching their hymn-books; whilst the lady at the harmonium had her fingers on the keys.

"Did you expect a hymn?" said I, afterwards.

"Yes," said she, smiling. "Surely John Carey wrote it down and passed it to the reading-desk."

In vindication, I handed the paper to her.

"Here it is," she exclaimed, triumphantly. I examined the notice more closely, and found that the words which I had taken in connection with the context to mean, "if not, him no go," were to be rendered, "if not—Hymn No. 90." These and other mistakes would be avoided by adopting the simple plan which I have found useful in the parishes where I have been incumbent: namely, that of writing the first line after the number of the hymn.

There is a kind of nightmare, peculiar, I believe, to the clergy:

that of keeping a congregation waiting by being unable to find one's place. How many dreams, as Hood reminds us, "are something more than fictions." Tennyson justly calls them the "refraction of events."

This dream, or fantasy, became too real to me on one occasion. The new table of lessons had just been introduced, and the churchwardens of C——, willing to move with the times, had moved every book from the broad ledge of the reading-desk (there was no lectern) and placed on it a brand new tome of meagre dimensions, supposed to contain the prayer-book and altered lectionary. The intricacies of Bradshaw were nothing to it. It was more misleading than the famous clock, which the owner alone remembered that when the hands pointed to seven and it struck two, the correct time was exactly twenty minutes to twelve. I had not a moment for inspection; for, being Good Friday, there was no singing; even the Gloria was read. When the time came for reading the lessons I saw little besides a kaleidoscopic jumble of paragraphs, with an occasional heading half-way down a page. No sequence—no intelligibility. I was too far above my flock to borrow a Bible. There was a solemn silence as I turned the leaves rapidly, and at length was obliged to fix upon chapters strangely out of harmony with the day.

This incident reminds me of another, when my old acquaintance, the Rector of E——, not easily disconcerted, was somewhat taken aback. He was deputed to read the first lesson at a Harvest Festival. The day was bright; the congregation large; the decorations equally cheerful. Mr. —— stepped with stately mien (he was brother to a bishop) to the lectern. Alas! the special lesson was not found; and his memory failed. That it was in Deuteronomy, he knew; and he hoped, by a rapid survey of the chapters, to identify the verses. It was all in vain. In his flurry he selected the end of the 27th chapter instead of the beginning of the 28th; and was afterwards plaintively reminded that he had reversed the history of Balaam inasmuch as he had been brought to bless the people and he had cursed them altogether.

On ordinary, as well as on special occasions, it is well to have the lessons found and marked beforehand. One cannot always call to mind chronological sequence; and it is very easy, when in haste or nervous, to pass over one of the minor prophets, or short epistles, without being able publicly to explain, as my primitive predecessor did at S——, when the leaves stuck together in the Psalms. Leaning over to the clerk, he exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion: "Clifford, Clifford! why have you not aired this book?"

Beware of venerable or dilapidated service books. The clergyman in Jersey who prayed for George IV. a week after that monarch was dead, was not more oblivious of history than my acquaintance T——, when he remembered "our gracious Queen Charlotte" in the Litany; and, at the communion table, floundering amid a catalogue, half erased, of deceased majesties, managed to revivify George II.

Poor T——, like Patrick O'Sheene, was born to blunder. From an inability to sound the letter G he would startle a congregation by the exclamation, "Let us *sin* to the praise, &c.;" and so little could he depend upon his memory that when first he published banns he could get no further than "If any of you know cause or just impediment;" adding, after a lengthened pause, "let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace." His notices were of a discursive kind. Saints' days and societies got inextricably mixed. Prayers would be announced for eight o'clock in the evening, and a Church Missionary Meeting for half-past nine in the morning. It was said that at the bishop's examination his answers to questions on the authenticity of the Gospels was a dissertation to prove that St. Paul was not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

How caustic were those lines; the impromptu of a far-seeing mamma on another clerical failing:

"My daughters praise our curate's eyes,  
But I can't say if they're divine,  
For when he prays he closes them,  
And when he preaches I close mine."

I am thankful that the old three-decker arrangement—clerk's desk, reading-desk, and pulpit—has generally been discarded; and clergymen can stand at ease when reading or preaching. What could be more trying to a nervous deacon on his first appearance than to be placed in a box "six feet above contradiction," the centre of a thousand eyes? How well I remember the feeling of being in the car of a balloon; and, glancing timorously at the expectant crowd below; whilst the gaseliers (turned down during the sermon) would cause such a rush and roar up the branches placed each side the ponderous cushion that the lights quavered several inches above the burners. No wonder that even the majestic Siddons spoke of the voice that would not come, and the tremor that would not go. The awful thrill, too, when one's sleeve catches the manuscript, and it is all but over the narrow ledge. "Over the brink of it; picture it, think of it!"

I also remember another singular arrangement. Half-a-dozen steps led to the reading-desk. These were pushed in after entering; and the deep door closed by the beadle, who then retired to the extreme end of the church. There was no escape without help. A stranger once leaving without ceremony, opened the door, and stepped into—vacancy. My kind incumbent (given to reverie) was penned in one evening and forgotten. He told me also of a "strange preacher," whose sermon answered to the definition of a line—length without breadth. An hour of somnolent syllabication passed; the congregation became fidgety; the incumbent perplexed. An hour and a half; and there was the sound of hurrying feet towards the West doors. Two hours! "Will the man *never* cease?" thought my friend, as he

looked at the last of the hearers in the parsonage pew. There was a whispered consultation among the custodians of St. Peter's. Should the organ strike up; or the gas be turned off; or a hymn be given out? At length, the beadle ascended the pulpit stairs, and pulling the orator by the gown exclaimed, "They are all gone out, sir!"

The Puritan preacher who would turn his hour-glass up again with the observation, "Now, my friends, we will have another glass together!" would scarcely have ventured upon a discourse lasting two hours and a half; and we stand aghast at Dr. Barrow's three-and-a-half-hours' sermon, and the late Archbishop's first charge when Bishop of London, lasting five hours.

Said my old friend, Professor D——, "Never be licensed to a church where there are galleries." In the classics he was at the front; in English composition nowhere. Finding that his manuscript sermons were at a discount, he tried extempore preaching on the plea: if you are persecuted in one text, flee unto another. His failure reminds me how an acquaintance was brought to grief over an unfortunate simile. He was speaking of the wilderness of Judea. "I dare say you understand, my brethren, what a wilderness is like. You all know Mow Cop," continued he, rather at a loss for modern instances. "Well, *that* is a wilderness." Now it happened that Mow Cop, a rugged hill some miles distant, formed a compact parish of some thousands of souls under the supervision of an energetic vicar; and great was his wrath upon hearing that his populous parish had been compared to a wilderness.

Professor D——, failing in originality, determined "to steal away the brains" of another. How he chuckled over the lament of the Somersetshire Rector:

"They broke into my dwelling: stole my silver and my store;

But they could not steal my sermons, for they were stole before."

My friend's sermons were now appreciated. Success began to animate him. Ah! he had forgotten the galleries from whence the discovery was made that he preached from print.

Not so a former vicar of Dronfield, who could deliver without observation the sentiments of the late Dr. Blair; until an old lady, one of his flock, chanced to read the identical sermon in the evening which she had heard in the morning. Ever afterwards she kept the volumes locked up in a box in the family pew. He mentioned that, on a later occasion, being pressed for time, he drew upon his favourite author. No sooner had he given out the text than the lady produced her copy of Blair. "But I just put the old woman off the scent," said he, "for I began three pages further on, and she never overtook me all the way through."

There is no duty more pleasing to the minister than that of joining hearts and hands together. I am not like the clerical bird of ill-omen who would afterwards refuse the customary fee with the remark, "Na, na, go your ways; I have done ye enough mischief for ane day."



When I was senior curate in a populous town, and had sometimes to publish between thirty and forty banns at a time, one difficulty was to remember the times of asking; another, to decipher the proper names set in a network of flourishes by the assiduous clerk. On one occasion only were the banns forbidden; but my readers will be pleased to hear that, notwithstanding this jolt, the course of true love *did* run smooth.

Those who are accustomed to the silent and decorous weddings of country churches would hardly realise the motley appearance and the strange disorder which prevailed some years ago in our mother churches; when twelve or fifteen couples were waiting the inevitable forget-me-not. Like the connubial crowd in Manchester Cathedral, who were bidden to be married first and afterwards to sort themselves, I seemed to be dealing out matrimony in the same wholesale manner. The task would have been easy had the parties remained precisely as they were stationed at the rails; but the gentlemen most interested in the ceremony would fall out of the ranks to whisper soft sawder to their supporters; whilst the ladies would retrograde to struggle out of gloves far too small, or to correct sudden familiarities from cousins not too far removed. Alas! there were no blue-ribbon men in those days, or all the blue ribbons were over the border: and as the betrothed were bound to have a "sup" before going "t' parson," the service was sadly marred by interpolations such as "Wilt thou have this woman (you must not laugh) to be thy wedded wife (loose her hands), to live together (don't keep saying, I will)?—Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her (please attend) in sickness and in health (turn this way), and forsaking all other (I shall wait until you are quiet) —."

There was a perplexing pause on one occasion, because the bridegroom was chasing the bridesmaids down the aisles, and would not be brought to book. Another time the ring was missing, and the lady would not, for luck, be married with any but a brand new article.

Another kind of diffidence struck me when I was a surrogate in a well-known inland spa. A stranger called upon me; and, after considerable hesitation and harking back, declared that a friend of his wished for a marriage licence.

"Is he near at hand?"

"Yes! but too much engaged to come."

"I am sorry; but you must try and persuade him."

"He is very unwell; in fact not able to leave his bed."

"And the lady?"

"Oh! she is in town."

"Very unfortunate," said I, "but one of the parties must make the application."

"Can't I have the licence?" exclaimed the gentleman in dismay.

"Not until you bring your friend."

He left the room, evidently perplexed. In a few minutes another ring at the bell. Same gentleman enters, looking down, and rubbing the silk of a new hat. "I am the friend!"

When making the entries in the parish registers, I never let the formula "of full age" suffice; and my enquiries under this head cause, I fear, many a slight subterfuge. Ah, those tell-tale registers! A careful search and comparison (Croker-like) will sometimes show that a bride was baptised six or seven years before she was born. (By the way—the lady of fifty-three who was lamenting to her husband the advent of her fortieth birthday, and was consoled by the rejoinder: "Never mind, my dear, you will get further from that frightful epoch every day," had better keep away from the Birmingham Free Library, where the name, age, and profession are tabulated every time one asks for a book.) Neither does it do to let the flurry and quaver of the bridal party cause their signatures to be locked up in hieroglyphic. I bend over, and direct that each name shall be full, clear, and legible; "written for those that come after;" taking care that even "Bill Stumps, his mark" shall have equal branches; and not sprawl over the page like a magnified daddy-long-legs. Looking the other day at an entry made in 1845, I found a geranium leaf pressed between the leaves. Probably it had formed part of the bridal bouquet of my parishioner; once the pretty Miss S——; but fit emblem now of the bouquet of life; blossom, verdure, fragrance, all gone: nothing but a withered stalk sitting in weeds in yonder pew, waiting for the end.

Speaking of the "Offices," care should be taken that the parties chiefly concerned are present; for I am not the first who has been led astray in this respect. How often has a clerk whispered: "Mrs. — wants to have her baby christened, and to be church'd; but they have not come yet." As the service proceeded, how anxiously I have waited the expected arrival; how relieved to hear the shrill treble from an atom of humanity.

Reasoning, like the sage Butler, from probability I have sometimes walked down the church after the second lesson to the far-off font, only to find that "I could not see my little friend because he was not there," and retraced my steps, demurely conscious of the inference from neighbouring eyes, that "someone had blundered." And even when the christening party duly waits at the font, how needful it is to be quite sure of the sex, and the name of the infant.

My dear friend H—— forgetting to ask, and assuming, I suppose, from its lusty cries that the child was a boy, proceeded with the service as written, when he was somewhat discomfited by a buxom lass with: "Please sir, he's a she!"

Larwood relates that a clergyman once reading the burial service, without knowing the sex of the departed, paused at the grave, and whispered to one of the bereaved, "Brother or Sister?" The man very innocently replied, "No relation at all, sir; only an acquaintance."

Once at M——, on the other hand, I was fearful that I had attributed the wrong sex to a child announced in an undertone to be a boy. To the demand, "Name this child!" came the half-audible response, "Carline!" Remembering how rustics clip their words, I again put the query. "Carline!" came back, in the shrill tone of a Mrs. Cluppins in the witness-box. "Caroline!" I whispered, "you said the child was a boy." "Oh, yes!" said the nurse, nodding approvingly and dinking the baby—"Carline!"

Calling to mind a case at Strensham, where a young lady was ordered to be named Francis; and another mentioned by Lord Albemarle of William Anne, I continued the service, giving the name as pronounced, and gliding delicately over the pronoun "*he*." When in the vestry I was relieved to find that the name really was Carline, a common family name in that hilly district.

At such times we may always tell whether the minister is a family man by the way he handles the baby. Paterfamilias receives the little one with graceful ease. Babbicombe rests on the raised left arm; peaceful and passive as a water lily. There is no disarrangement of the infantine drapery; in a word, no gaucherie. But, mark the lone bachelor taking up his duplicate in swaddling clothes. First the entanglement of nurse's shawl with the surplice; the inclination to elevate the tiny feet some two feet higher than baby's head; then the frantic struggle and squall, as if the newly-opened eyes realised the close embrace of a finny monster of the deep.

If it behoves the clergyman carefully to ascertain the arrival of the christening party, additional caution is necessary when there is notice of a churching. A ludicrous *contretemps* happened to me in a former parish, where such notice was usually given the previous day, and the ladies often came into church late. Fortunately there was no occasion to scan rows of distant seats, and endeavour to single out the grateful object of solicitude, for the good old times had provided a spacious enclosure conveniently placed near the door, and having in buff letters "writ large" on a black ground—"Churching Pew;" so there could be no mistake.

And yet a mistake was made. For one afternoon in July, having received due notice of a 'churching,' the above official seat remained empty until the end of the second lesson. What possessed Miss B——, unless she had a bee in her bonnet, to test her walking powers that sultry afternoon by rising from an early dinner, and walking to a strange church? If Johnson declared to Mrs. Thrale, afterwards the octogenarian, that "life declines at thirty-five," what must a walk of two miles be over Derbyshire hill and dale to a town-bred spinster, and stout, twice that age?

The result was to be expected. The bell went down as Miss B—— went up the last hill but one. At length she reached the porch a quarter of an hour late. "Never mind," thought the lady, "I will pass in noiselessly and take the first seat." The door had

been turned back for the proper occupant, therefore Miss B. did not see the title on the panel; and feeling very hot and tired she remained seated during the whole service. Perceiving the ample outline of a lady, and not then knowing who Miss B. was, I concluded that her mission was to return thanks, and read the appointed service, when all the congregation stood during the psalm; and many looked curiously at the elderly lady complacently seated in the state pew. The reader may imagine my consternation, afterwards, when I learned that the woman who was to have been present, stayed away because it was unpleasantly warm; and that I had scandalised a bevy of marriageable young ladies of good position by churching their venerable maiden aunt!



## ONE LIFE.

HER white little hand is resting  
On the arm that held it of old,  
And he thinks it is only the night-breeze  
That makes it so soft and cold.

Her eyes into his are gazing—  
Eyes ever so faithful to him,  
And he thinks it the shadowy twilight  
That makes them so strange and dim.

Her pretty face turns towards him;  
Ah, when did her face turn away?  
And he thinks it the silvery moonlight  
That makes it so faint and grey.

O spirit that lingers and falters,  
Take courage and whisper "Good bye."  
A life?—why a life is nothing,  
When millions each minute die.

With millions each minute dying,  
What matters one life or death?  
One fragile and tender existence?  
One tremulous passing breath?

A life? Why a life is nothing!  
What matters tho' one burn dim?  
Alas for the folly of reason—  
One life is the world to him!

E. A. H.

"TILL DEATH US DO PART."

"TILL death us do part," rang out the low, clear voice of the officiating minister throughout the quiet church. And "Till death us do part" spoke the man who knelt before him; and "Till death us do part" in her turn repeated the woman.

Thus they plighted their troth in the face of the world and before Heaven, that man and woman, Humphrey Carbonel and Emma Crane. They had promised to love and cherish and honour each other, and he to comfort her and she to obey him in sickness and in health, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, *until death did them part.*

May breezes stole softly in through the open porch; May violets filled the air with perfume; May birds were singing; May dews yet sparkled on the jewelled grass. It was a true bridal morning; and, amid the almost Sabbath stillness and the spring-tide loveliness, the vows were exchanged that made them one.

Until death! The lover-husband glanced down upon the timid girl whose hand lay in his, feeling suddenly how terrible was that word—*death!* Why should the thought have come to him? He clasped the trembling hand closer, as if he felt already the chilling of those warm pulses. Even in the midst of the solemn service, his imagination travelled forward to a day when those solemn promises would have been fulfilled, and death had ended all—*her* death. It did not occur to Captain Carbonel to think that it might be his own.

The young girl, happy and smiling in her bridal robes, never once thought of death at all. How should she? And how—still less, *how*—could either of them call up a picture of something worse than death to break the marriage vow?

A young couple they, supremely happy on that May morning. Sunshine, and glistening dew, and opening flowers, and the joyous song of birds—*they* do not put forth notions of winter-chill and gloom. No, nor portend it.

*"What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!"*

The tremulous voice of the clergyman, for he was agitated, pronounced those words very solemnly. The smile upon the bridegroom's lip echoed but that of his heart. *Who* should have power to put asunder two who loved so well? And Emma? She thought only of the strong, manly form by her side. It was the old, old story of the oak and the vine. The present happiness was perfect, and the future would be like unto it; nay, much more abundant.

So reason we in our blindness, in the inexperienced youth of our early morning, when the glamour of hope is upon us, and all looks radiant. Later, standing before the calm-faced teacher, whose name



is Life, we learn that no earthly existence is perfect; that the sunniest life hath shadows, and that the sweet spring-time, the brightest summer, must give place to faded flowers, to dying leaves.

"You cannot have Emma unless you retire altogether from the army, or get put upon half-pay," had said Emma Crane's stern old guardian to Captain Carbonel; for she had neither father nor mother, brother nor sister. And Humphrey Carbonel, tired perhaps of a soldier's idle life, for all the world seemed to have been at peace for ages and likely to remain so, got put upon half-pay.

Sure never did a couple begin life under more promising auspices! They had a pretty homestead of their own—it was Emma's, not his—amid a small colony of other pretty homesteads, and they had between them a handsome competency, and there was pleasant society around; and life was as delightful as a morning dream.

A child was born to them, but it died. That brought sorrow. No other child came, and time went on. And here some lines that I met with in a periodical in youthful days occur to me. I don't know whose they are. If I knew then I have forgotten.

.. "Alas, that early love should fly,  
That friendship's self should fade and die;  
And glad hearts pine with cankering fears,  
And starry eyes grow dim with tears!  
For years are sad and withering things,  
And sorrow lingers, and joy has wings;  
And falsehood steals into sunny bowers,  
And time's dull footstep treads on flowers.  
And the waters of life flow deep and fast,  
And they bear to the sorrowful grave at last."

Why should the lines be put in here? Because they just express the altered condition of things that fell upon Humphrey and Emma Carbonel. They grew estranged from one another, hardly knowing how, or why. He said she no longer cared to please him, her husband; she said he liked other wives better than her—that he gave them all his attention, and gave her none. And again time went on.

Seven times had the May violets opened their blue eyes in the mossy dells since that lovely day when he and she had vowed to love and cherish each other until death did them part; seven times the May dew-drops had made the green meadows all aglow with sparkles; and seven times the sweet spring flowers had faded beneath the scorching heat of summer. Ah, if violets had been the only things that had died out in those seven years!

It was May again now. But it brought no cherished bridal flowers to Humphrey Carbonel and his wife, no clasping of hands, no fulfilment of love's glorious prophecy. Estrangement had but deepened, and they were parting in pride and anger. Tired with the state of affairs at home—the unbending coldness, the resentful tones, the cruel bickerings in which both indulged—Captain Carbonel

had got placed on full service again. He was going out to be shot at, if fate so willed; for we were at war now.

The day of departure dawned, and they parted with bitter words. Heaven and their own hearts knew how much or how little they suffered: there was no outward sign of it. People, who had ceased to wonder at the suspected estrangement between Captain and Mrs. Carbonel, said to one another that it was brave of him to go out voluntarily to the wars. "*Marlbrouck s'en-va-t-en-guerre!*" So he went off with an indifferent countenance and a jaunty air; and she stayed behind equally jaunty, equally indifferent.

One year passed on. Emma Carbonel began to feel lonely, to sicken of her unsatisfactory life. Bit by bit she had grown to see that she and Humphrey had been but foolish, both of them, the one as much so as the other. Did he feel the same? It might be. Yet their letters continued to be of the scantiest and coldest.

Another year dragged itself on, and then she made no pretence of keeping up the farce of resentment to her own heart. Time, generally speaking, shows up our past mistakes in their true colours. Emma Carbonel longed for her husband to come home, she grew feverishly impatient to be reconciled. Mariana in the Moated Grange was a favourite reading of hers just now—

"She said, 'I am a weary, weary,

He cometh not,' she said:

"'He cometh not, and all is dreary—

I would that I were dead!'"

Humphrey Carbonel came not. Nothing came but the details of the fighting; wars, and rumours of wars.

May was in again; another May. Mrs. Carbonel sat at her window in the twilight of a chilly, drizzling day. The gloom without harmonised with the gloom within. And yet, hardly so. The rain might be cold, dreary, dispiriting, but it was nothing as compared with the desolation of her heart. Childless, and worse than widowed! She had hoped, ah! for a year or two now, that Humphrey's old love for her might overrule his pride and bitterness, and prompt him to write to her a word of tender regret for their conduct to one another. But he did not. She was feeling it all to her heart's core this miserable evening; unavailing remorse lay heavily upon her; she wished she could die and end it. No sign of reconciliation had passed since they parted in pride and anger; not a word of repentance on either side had crossed the dreary gulf that flowed between them. Words of another poet, dead and gone, floated through her mind as she sat. Night and day lately they had seemed to haunt it.

"Alas! they had been friends in youth—

But whispering tongues can poison truth.

And constancy lives in realms above,  
And life is thorny, and youth is vain :  
And to be wrath with one we love,  
Doth work like madness in the brain."

Should she go mad? There came moments when she feared she should if this state of things continued. A week ago there had been some talk in the papers that the war would, in all probability, soon be over. Then Humphrey would come home again.

Her thoughts turned to this phase; she began to dwell upon it, and what it would involve to him and to her. Presently she lost herself in fond anticipations, realising it all as in a picture. Somehow she felt a strange nearness to him, as if he were coming then, were almost there. She heard the rain beating against the windows, and she glanced to see that the fire in the grate was bright, with a singular sense that it ought to be bright when he came in. She gazed beyond the house gates down the road in the gathering gloom, almost, *almost* expecting to see him approach, as she used to see him in the days gone by. She had been wretchedly lonely so long now: and she wanted to hear his footstep in the hall, to feel his caressing hand on her sunny hair, and to hear his bright words, "Good evening, Emma, my dear!" It did not seem strange to her that this should happen, or that she was expecting it, though she had never once had this feeling through all these separated years. It did not seem marvellous that he should come thus from beyond seas without notice. Had he opened the door and stood there by her side she would not have felt startled or surprised, or at all wondered at it. The bewilderment wrought by long-continued sorrow had stolen over her senses.

But Humphrey did not come. Only, instead, the postman came in at the gate, and knocked at the door. Mechanically she wondered why he was so late this evening. She heard the servant who answered the knock say the same to the man.

"Yes, it's late," he answered. "A mail from the war is in, you see; and it brought a good many letters."

The woman came in with a thick letter and the lights. Her mistress took it with nervous haste. A *thick* letter, and from her husband! until now his letters had been of the thinnest and slightest. The writing—*was* it Humphrey's? Why, yes, it was his; but what could make it look so shaky? She opened it carefully, and some enclosures fell out. A fond letter or two of hers written to him after their marriage, during a temporary separation; a curl of her sunny hair; a plain gold ring which he had worn ever since his wedding-day; and a little folded note with a few trembling lines in it.

"I am dying, Emma. Fell to-day in battle. God forgive us our folly, my precious wife! I believe we loved one another all the while. There is another Life, my dear one. I shall be waiting for you there.—Humphrey."

Emma Carbonel did not cry, did not faint. She lay back in a

low, large chair, her meek hands clasped in supplication, praying to be pardoned for all her hard wickedness to her dead husband, feebly beseeching God, in His mercy, to take her to that better life.

The next day the papers published a list of the fallen. Fifteen soldiers and two officers, one of the latter being Captain Humphrey Carbonel.

So it was all over. Death had parted them. They had taken their marriage vows to love and to cherish one another until death did them part—and lo! now it had stepped in to do its work.

Ah! but something else had stepped in previously: angry passions indulged in, malice not suppressed. But for that, Humphrey Carbonel had never gone out to the fatal plain where death was indiscriminately putting in his sickle. Emma Carbonel would have given now her own life to recal the past.

Experience must be bought; sometimes all too dearly. She saw how worse than foolish it is, taking it at the best, to render our short existence here one of marring anger. Evil temper bears us up at the moment, but time must bring the reaction, and the repentance. A little forbearance on both sides, especially on hers, a few soothing words, instead of spiteful retorts, and this bitter retribution had not been hers; or his, in dying. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." If they had but obeyed the words of holy writ!

And now what was left to them? Death had claimed him, and all was over. To her, a life-long time of anguished remorse, a vain longing to undo what could never be undone in this world. Could not some of us, hot and hasty in our dealings, learn a lesson from it?

But something better was in store for Emma Carbonel. Humphrey did not die. Within a week the news came to her that the injuries, which had induced a death-like swoon mistaken at the time for death, had not yet been fatal. He was removed to the hospital, was being treated there by skilful surgeons, and the issue was as yet uncertain.

The issue was not for death, but life. Some months later he came home, a maimed soldier, bearing about him marks which time would never efface.

Just at the dusk of evening, as she had pictured it in her fond dream, he came. When the fly drove up to the door with him, she was surprised, for he was not expected until the next day. He came in, slowly limping. The bustle over, the servants shaken hands with, he lay back, fatigued, in the easy chair, Emma kneeling before him, clinging to him in passionate emotion, tears streaming from her eyes, whispering to him in deprecating terms to forgive her.

"Upon condition that you forgive me, Emma," he answered, agitated as herself. "It has been a sharp experience for us both. My darling wife, I do not think we shall ever quarrel with one another again."

"Never again; never a single mis-word again, Humphrey, so long as life shall last."

E. L. L.

## THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "IN THE BLACK FOREST," ETC.

THE Bull-ring of Granada is capable of holding many thousand spectators. Like all others of its kind in Spain, it is open to the sky. As a place of public entertainment it has its seats of "high and low degree." The performance generally takes place about five o'clock, when the declining sun gives the building a shady and a sunny side. The former commands a higher price than the latter, so that an early visitor not in the secret, will mildly wonder to find the sunny side packed and blazing, the shady seats still half empty. Before the play begins, however, there is scarcely standing room on the right hand or on the left, and late comers are often turned away. The bull-fight is the most popular and renowned amusement in Spain: and the more cruel the sport, the greater the pleasure, excitement, and gratification of the spectators.

Our courier, after his twenty minutes' struggle, secured the best places at command. They were excellent for seeing, in the shade, sufficiently elevated, and not too far from the arena: plain stone seats, tier above tier, uncushioned, and running round the whole building, mere divisions here and there marking degrees in price. Behind us, sloping upwards, was what might be called the dress-circle. Still higher were the boxes, reserved for the authorities and élite of the town. Most of these subscribe by the year, just as one may subscribe in London for a box at the opera.

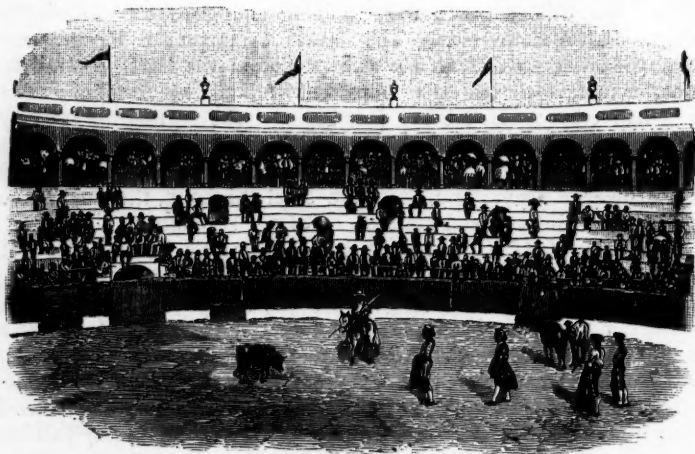
The Spanish bull-fight is a sort of drama in three acts, and the performers are divided into four classes. The *espadas* come last of all, and kill the bull with the sword. Most expert, they are paid at the highest rate, and receive the greatest applause. As a rule, they are wiry, quick, somewhat small men, and their frequent good looks enlist people's sympathies in their favour. There are the *banderilleros*, whose part is to stick small weapons—something like a rocket-stick with a large, thin fish-hook fastened to it—into the back of the animal. The bull, gradually infuriated by pain, sometimes rushes madly about, sometimes stands at bay, not knowing what to make of it all.

At the commencement the bull is suddenly launched from its dark cell into the broad glare of the arena, where it is greeted with the shouts of the multitude. Dazzled and bewildered, it plunges for the centre, and stands there, almost as if suddenly stupefied by some narcotic; nor moves until the *chulos* or *capas* attract its attention by holding up the proverbial "red rag" to its terrified vision.

The *capas* are picked men, provided with long red cloths or



banners, to attract the bull's attention at critical moments, and work it up to a pitch of frenzy. Especially needed are they when the picador is in danger, and the bull, having, as it were, driven him into a corner, makes a dead set at him or his horse. Then up comes the capa, and flourishing his red banner, turns the animal to a fresh point of attack and releases the picador. These capas have to be men of agility, and many a time nothing else saves them from certain death. Over and over again if their foot slipped they would never have the chance of attending another bull-fight. The heart stops and the blood freezes as you think the bull has the capa at last, and no earthly power can release him. And he



A SMALL BULL FIGHT; NOT THE BULL RING OF GRANADA.

frequently escapes only by jumping over the partition that separates the arena from the spectators.

The *picadores* carry the lance and are mounted. Their business is to ride at the bull, and defend themselves and their horses from its attack, contriving the while to prick the animal just sufficiently to draw blood and cause enough pain to commence infuriation.

The chief bull-fights of Spain—those of Seville and Madrid—are organised with an elaboration not to be seen in any other town. The best men are to be found there, and they seldom fight elsewhere. The play commences with a procession of the whole band of performers, who, in their gay dresses—picadores on horseback and chulos carrying their red banners wound round the arm—enter the arena and cross it solemnly to the Mayor's box. That dignitary then throws down a key that is supposed to release the bull from confinement. The *espada* as solemnly picks it up, an act considered equivalent to an assertion that he will do his duty either by killing the bull or

losing his own life in the combat. The procession then retires, the trumpets sound, and the bull rushes in.

We took our seats amidst a vast concourse of men and women given over to excitement and expectation. The women looked, if possible, more anxious than the men, for the enjoyment of the coming sport. An expression of cruelty seemed to dominate most of the faces. This might have been fancy; but whether it was so or not, only a nature hardened to cruelty could possibly, time after time, take pleasure in this national pastime.



BULL FIGHTERS.

To-day there was no procession. The hour struck from the town clocks, and the sound came in through the open space above. As with one consent, the multitude directed their gaze towards the entrance to the arena. The trumpets blew a shrill martial air. Enter the bull—a somewhat small animal, black as jet, hero and victim of the moment.

Out of darkness into this blazing sunlight and heat. The animal rushed to the centre of the ring and stood still, looking stupid and terror-stricken. Then entered the capas, with their long red cloaks or banners, followed by three picadores, mounted on the most wretched hacks ever seen: living skeletons of horses, only fit to be put to death, though not in this merciless kind of way. The wretched animals seemed hardly able to bear the weight of their

riders—a weight, indeed, sufficient to test the powers of a horse in good condition.

One of the capas advanced and flourished his banner. The bull gazed for a bewildered instant, then head down, plunged full tilt at the point of attack. The capa sprang from side to side, performing wonderful feats of agility. This portion of the spectacle was interesting and exciting. The dextrous manner in which the capas avoid the bull; the graceful wave and flourish of the banners; their gay and picturesque dresses, showing off to perfection the active, well-made forms: these are the few redeeming, not excusing, points in the drama: a drama which sometimes ends in a terrible tragedy. Each time that the capa escaped from what seemed a moment of extreme peril, the crowd clapped and cheered lustily, and the bull, between the noise and the dazzling red, seemed to grow paralysed with terror, and took that hunted look so painful to see in any animal.

A picador advanced, watched his opportunity, pricked the bull with his lance, and backed. The bull, roused by the pain, dashed at the horse. Up came a capa with his red banner, and, diverting the attention of the bull, for a moment saved the horse. All was now excitement. The play had really begun. The eyes of the spectators flashed with pleasure; mouths opened with eagerness; the rustle of a surging tide ran through the assembly. Again the women looked more cruelly full of enjoyment than the men. The capas were all in the combat, waving their banners from all parts, springing from side to side, jumping the barrier when hard pushed, maddening the bull. As I have said, this part of the entertainment, as far as the capas were concerned, was graceful and interesting.

Again a picador advanced, pricked the back of the animal, that with one bound plunged its horns into the horse. It is hardly too much to say that it made one's blood curdle: and from this point, the play became a scene of horror.

A portion of what followed is not to be described. The horse fell, rolling over its rider. The latter would be crushed over and over again, but he is so protected by padding and invisible armour that he does not easily come to harm. Weighted and encumbered by these necessary shields, he has to be raised by the capas. The horse, maimed, mutilated, dying, is again goaded on to its feet, and the play re-commences. The more horrible it grows, the greater the enjoyment of the spectators.

At one moment three horses lay dead in the ring, and this ended the first act of the drama. The trumpets sounded, the picadores retired for the present, amidst a volley of cheers that were wild and deafening.

Then commenced the second part. The capas, more needed than ever, remained in the arena. In came the banderilleros, with their barbs or hooks. There were no horses, but the risk to the men was

greater than at first. Their part was to stick these short barbs into the back of the bull, a feat requiring great activity and presence of mind. Over and over again it seemed that nothing could save them from certain death: and sometimes nothing did save them except a jump over the barrier, or a capa advancing with his banner and directing the fury of the animal towards himself.

The scene was no doubt exciting, but it was also full of pain. The bull often seemed in the very act of plunging his horns into his enemy, who, nevertheless, escaped as by a miracle. Capas and banderilleros were all life and quicksilver. The bull in a short time was rushing about with five or six barbs in his back, streaked with red, hunted, maddened, unable to escape. In some bull-fights crackers are attached to the sticks, which explode as soon as the hook is fixed into the animal.

The barbs disposed of, the trumpets again sounded; Act the Second was over.

Act the Third. The bull had now to be killed—or to kill his opponent, for this sometimes happens. In came the espada, with his sword, carrying a short red cloak. He was dressed in black velvet, fitting tightly to the body, was small and active, and looked courageous and determined. The people received him with loud applause.

This is the most critical part of the performance. Single-handed, the espada has to attack the bull, parry its plunges, and end the play. It requires the greatest activity, nerve, and presence of mind; whilst to plunge the sword into the animal down to the very hilt, needs dexterity and strength of wrist.

The bull, after a few moments' rest and respite, was standing, exhausted with rage, pain and loss of blood, but still a formidable enemy. The espada, throwing his cloak over his sword to conceal it, advanced cautiously and waved it to and fro. As if tired of the play and unwilling to begin again, the animal took no notice beyond slightly raising its head and blinking its eyes. Then once more seized with fury, it suddenly plunged at the espada, who sprang aside and let the animal rush past.

This sort of thing went on for five minutes or more. The fate of the espada seemed often to hang upon a thread. Over and over again his activity and presence of mind alone saved him from death. Many times he tried to plunge his sword into the animal where the spine and the neck meet. At last came the inevitable opportunity. The bull lowered its head at the red cloak, and paused to make a surer attack. That moment's hesitation was the espada's triumph. Tearing the cloak from the sword, in an instant the thin steel blade had disappeared; the bull fell dead upon the ground.

There was no roof to raise, and the people rent the air instead. Women fluttered their fans, men waved their hats, applauded and beat a veritable devil's tattoo. Some, excited beyond bounds, threw their hats and caps into the arena. The conqueror stood im-

passive in the midst of the uproar. The trumpets blew a loud and prolonged blast. A team of mules rushed in and rushed out again with their burdens : the dead bull and the dead horses. The play was o'er.

For a few minutes there was silence and respite : breathing time. Then all began again. Another bull was launched into the arena. Again the capas, and picadores on other miserable hacks, entered ; again the attendant horrors. This first part, with its cruelties to the horses, is worst of all. When six horses and two bulls had been killed, we all felt we had had enough, and departed, eight of us, in single file. No doubt the crowd looked down in pitying contempt ; for they, indeed, were only just warming up to the right pitch of enthusiasm and enjoyment.



GARDEN OF LINDARAJA.

But we had had even more than we cared for. One's feelings had been properly harrowed, curiosity was satisfied. It might be the right thing to see a bull-fight once ; there was no desire to see it again. Yet it is the favourite pastime of Spain ; an institution firmly rooted in the hearts of the people ; and at least one king has risked his popularity in endeavouring to put it down. They will have it. Its influence can only keep alive in the Spanish temperament all that is cruel, and stir up the evil that is in them. The very children, as soon as they can talk and walk and observe, are taken to the bull-fight, and grow up familiar with the sight of blood and torture. No doubt it is degrading ; but where a people possesses revolutionary power and sway over a country it is difficult to discontinue anything on which it has set its heart.

After we left, five more bulls were killed and about fifteen horses.



The espada, too, nearly lost his life. Once, his foot slipped ; he did not quite fall, but the bull was able to reach him. Its horn, happily, glided in between the arm and the ribs, hurting neither, and so he escaped yet again. But what can be said in favour of those plays and pastimes where such dangers are possible ?

We had heard much of the gipsies, and the gipsy dance ; of the king of the gipsies, who was really king by virtue of centuries of descent, and was said to be almost the best guitar player in Spain. It seemed right to hear these wonderful people and judge of them. They live in caves below the Alhambra, and for a consideration are prepared to put on their best, turn out, and perform. A messenger



TORRE DE LA VELA AND THE ARADERES.

was despatched desiring their attendance, and after dinner we sallied forth.

We had dined, that evening, in the open air, under the trellised vines that threw their quivering outlines across the snow-white table-cloth. Orange trees loaded the passing breeze with perfume ; myrtles and rich roses and gorgeous geranium-blooms enriched the garden. Distant mountains belted the Vega, as if they would shut out the world beyond, all cold and cruel influences, everything that intrudes. We traced their dreamy outlines ; whilst the plain reposed in all the beauty and glow and calm of a midsummer night. The sky was growing a deeper blue, the birds in the groves were singing a vesper hymn to departing day.

And we, in such influence, of what did we talk ? Of poetry—Lalla Rookh—Spanish beauties—the Arabian Nights—Strains of divine music—Moonlight serenades—Elysian fields and Arcadian

bowers? Any subject that was magical and dreamy and romantic? On the contrary. Some one fired a rocket and opened up the question of politics. I remember it now. The arguments waxed warm. Each defended his colours on premises that he thought unanswerable. And when our feelings had been harrowed all round, some one put an end to the debate by declaring that, like the landlord in "Silas Marner," it was best in these days to "hold with both sides," and so have sympathy with neither. "I agree with Mr. Macey, here, as there's two opinions," says the host of the Rainbow; "and if mine was asked, I should say they're both right. Tookey's right, and Winthrop's right, and they've only got to split the difference and make themselves even."

The effrontery of such a quotation in such a cause, to the larger number present, who were sterling conservatives of the good old-fashioned sort, was too barefaced for reply. So we gave up politics, and resorted to the roses and the orange flowers, the hushing birds and the far-off hills. We turned into the long sitting-room, where the shadows were deepening, opened the piano, and made music on our own account. A small crowd gathered in the gloom of the corridor and under the windows, and when we forsook music for the gipsies we wondered to find so large an audience. Evidently other instruments besides guitars, and other songs besides moonlight serenades beneath some fair one's balcony, are appreciated in this land of impulse and passion, intrigue and romance.

We were to meet the gipsies in a house not far from the hotel; a house near the "Red Towers," overlooking the plains of the Vega, the flowing waters of the Darro, the snow-capped Sierra Nevada. Here, in an upstairs room, we awaited the tribe.

The king was the first to arrive. His guitar had preceded him in the hands of one of his subjects, who had immediately decamped. His majesty's appearance was not very regal and imposing, but when compared with those who came after, he certainly rose in one's estimation. He accepted a cigar, and smoked it whilst giving us a series of gipsy airs, now wild and discordant and with an absence of melody that would have delighted the School of the Future, and now somewhat weird and plaintive. It was a very fine instrument, and he played tolerably well; but when rumour called him one of the best players in Spain, rumour, as is her wont, had wandered very far from the Palace of Truth.

The gipsies, men and women, began to appear in ones, twos, and threes, until about sixteen or twenty had assembled. Some looked bashful as they slipped into the room and took their seats with a shy grin upon their faces. Other some would have been improved perhaps by a little more bashfulness.

For example.

One of the young women in the course of the evening came up to Broadley, and fixing her pensive eyes upon him, invited him to

emigrate with her to Salt Lake City. But I explained that he was under my care and jurisdiction; that though I felt sure so great a traveller would have been charmed to escort her to Salt Lake City, yet, unfortunately, it could not be. Indicating Mr. Edward Jago, I remarked that he was free to roam the wide world, and that if he developed a fancy for crossing the Atlantic, I should not feel called upon to offer any opposition. But there was a dignity and reserve about him that evidently rather terrified the young lady, and she returned to her seat in high displeasure. Presently, she broke out into a strain of improvisation, like another Sappho or a second Corinne. Theme and melody must have been full of wailing agony and profound despair. Agony and despair were certainly the effect it had upon some of her hearers.

Three or four of them took it in turn thus to improvise, very much after the manner of the singing we had heard—and not admired—in the cafés of Malaga. Without being quite so repulsive, it was almost as painful. The old king occasionally struck a random chord upon his guitar, which only seemed to make yet more melancholy the long-drawn cadences indulged in by the singer.

They danced a gipsy dance, and if confined to the gipsies, so much the better for the world at large. It was very graphic and demonstrative, and so energetic that sometimes one trembled for the room. The gipsies themselves thoroughly enjoyed it, if no one else did, and applauded each other when it was over. Most of them were singularly ugly and awkward, without a particle of the grace and beauty with which poetry and romance love to clothe these wandering tribes of earth.

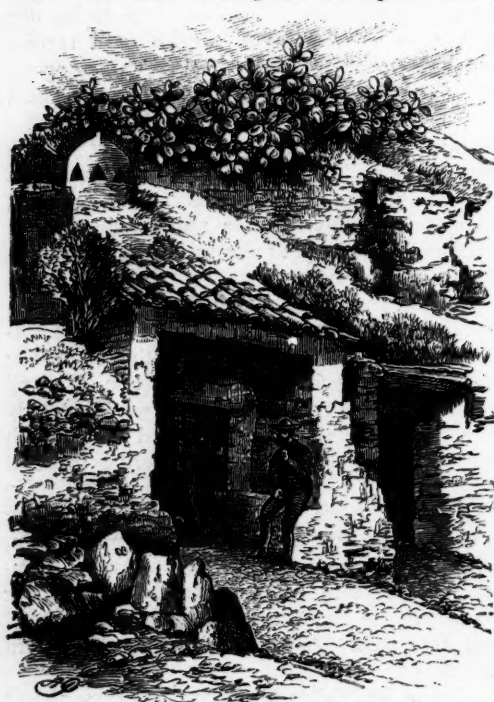
Our politeness held out for more than an hour, and then the assembly broke up. The women surrounded us as we went down, begging for money for fairings; ribbons and garlands and other harmless vanities: nor would they be satisfied until they had cleared our pockets of whatever small change had lurked there. On the whole, the exhibition was not a success. Anyone visiting the Alhambra will lose nothing by avoiding the gipsies.

The sun had set, darkness had fallen, the moon had risen almost as large and round as last night, and, if anything, was more brilliant. Never a cloud as large as a man's hand had chequered the sky since we had left Gibraltar. The heat of day only gave place to the comparative coolness of night. To-day the grass had not grown under our feet; we had not known an idle moment. And now that it was growing late, some talked of resting from their labours. On the morrow, another long day's journey back to Malaga was in store for us. The train left at an unearthly hour, and soon after four o'clock we must again be in action.

Somehow the gipsies had left a slightly unpleasant sensation behind them, jarring like a discord in an exquisite melody. It seemed a pity to close one's day and recollections of the Alhambra with such

an experience. I proposed that we should once more visit the palace by moonlight, renew and confirm all our previous impressions. Broadley alone responded. For the others sleep seemed to have the greater charm. It was now midnight: the witching hour when ghosts might be supposed to lurk in those solemn halls. If we listened, perhaps we should hear the groans of the unhappy Abencerrages, the hollow chains in the Court of Lions.

So we started. Our guide accompanied us without a demur, not-



GIPSY CAVE.

withstanding the hour; proving, as from the commencement, the most ready and willing man in existence, to whom nothing came amiss and nothing was a trouble. In this instance we could not do without him. Our ambition was to wander at will through the halls and courts without Diogenes and his lantern to pilot us about at his own pace and pleasure. Wiley knew every inch of the ground, and under his guidance we could dispense with Diogenes.

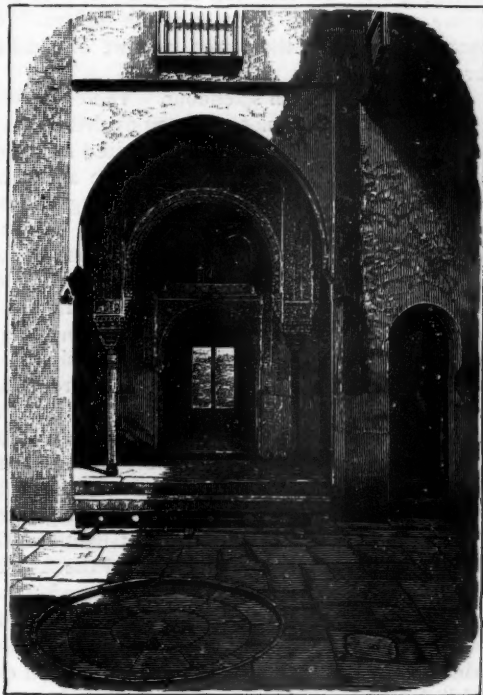
I believe that some of those we

left behind regretted their decision, but since they had so decided, perhaps we were not sorry to be alone. There would be no one's time and inclination to study; we might wander about at will, and return "when so disposed."

The grove was hushed in the silence of midnight: that peculiar and mysterious influence that ever seems to envelop trees when darkness falls. It is as if they knew the secrets of life and all creation, and were pregnant with warning. The brooklet trickled over its stony bed, hastening to the broader waters of the Darro. In those solemn trees and about the walls we distinctly traced shadowy forms that certainly

were not visitors from another world. Late though the hour, we here and there heard the far-off twang of a guitar, and wondered who was being serenaded. But neither substance from this world nor shadow from another molested us, and presently the modest portal admitted one to enchanted realms. A gentle ring instantly brought forth Diogenes the wakeful. Surely the man never slept, so alert was he at the first note of entreaty for entrance. He raised his lantern, recognised old friends, and admitted them with a welcome. Then Wiley possessed himself of the lantern, and the key of the tower, and Diogenes left us to our own devices.

It was later than last night, and the moon was higher and more brilliant, though a day past the full. Again, on entering the Court of the Myrtles, we were charmed into silence by the moonlight effect, which turned the tracery above the arches into the finest gossamer. Again it seemed that the hand of man could never have produced such a result. The still water in the long pool reflected the stars and the dark



ENTRANCE TO THE ROYAL MOSQUE, ALHAMBRA.

sky and outlined the massive Tower of Comares. The myrtles and the pillars threw dark shadows on the pavement. Snow-white looked the marble, where the moon fell upon it. Beneath the galleries and down the long arcades the gloom was more impenetrable and mysterious than ever.

Ghosts certainly might lurk here, if anywhere. The numerous columns of the Court of Lions might have stood for sepulchres, spirit-haunted. But the groans we listened for came not, and the clanking chains were inaudible. We saw nothing more unearthly than the bats wheeling their crazy flight about pillar and dome and



roof. Only the hooting of a distant owl broke the stillness of the midnight air.

Lovely and lonely was this Court of Lions; yet more mysterious and impressive than last night. Then all had been so new that it was seen and realised only as a dream. To-night it still had all the mystic beauty and poetry of dreamland combined with reality. We wandered through the Halls of the Abencerrages and the Ambassadors, the seven divisions of the Hall of Justice, all the long corridors and cloisters and arcades; now in broad moonlight, now feebly guided by the glimmer of the lantern. Then our master-key opened the door of the tower, and we climbed the narrow staircase for a last view.

The moon rolled in splendour. The country was flooded with her light, as clear though not as strong as that of day. Not content with our present position, a mad freak seized us. But here, if anywhere, madness is to be pardoned. With the agility of cats, we began to scale the red, pantiled roof that, slanting upwards to a dizzy point, was crowned by a lightning conductor. There we hung on to the iron, as if for dear life. It was a delicious position, intoxicating and commanding. We had risen above people and cities and worlds. In the soft luxuriance of the Southern summer night we seemed to float in ether, wafting towards the skies and the stars. With a firm hold of the rod, we hung over the precipices and revelled in the unutterable scene. Granada, belted by trees and sleeping in repose, looked like a deserted city. Its streets and houses and red roofs were clearly and distinctly outlined. We heard the distant murmuring of water, traced the flowing of the Darro, the sweep of the long avenues, whose foliage seemed to rustle in the night wind. The courts below us, and the myrtle and orange trees in the Garden of Lindaraja, were in all their beauty of light and shadow. Beyond the town the great plain of the Vega and the far-off hills stretched outwards and upwards in silent majesty, and the snows of the Sierra Nevada looked soft and sleeping in the moonbeams.

Moment after moment passed. It was impossible to forsake this paradise, more beautiful than anything we had ever seen or imagined. Well for us that the iron rod held its place, or a diminished party might have returned to the Reserve Squadron. But the temptation of reaching that highest point had been irresistible, and we had our reward.

Gliding down those tiles proved a harder task than the getting up, yet it had to be done. Presently we found ourselves on terra firma, if a little lower in the world. It was now nearly two in the morning, and wisdom suggested the necessity of at least some rest and respite before commencing the labours of another day. Nothing could again equal that moonlight view, soft, beautiful and romantic, as we had seen and revelled in it from the tower's giddy height. It should be our last recollection, worthy the place and the occasion, of all that

had gone before, of living for ever in the memory. So we lingered no more as we slowly went through the courts of the palace. The key and the lantern were delivered to the amiable Diogenes, we bade him farewell, and passed out into the ordinary world. The door of this enchanted ground closed upon us.

Back at the "Washington Irving," we sought our pillows; but to one at least sleep came not. Before his closed eyes there passed a continuous vision of the bull-fight, with all its horrors vivid as we had seen them in the afternoon. When the guide came up between four and five to call us, he found me girded and ready for battle.

"Wiley," I said, "have you not been to bed? I thought the waiters were to see to us this morning."

"So they were, sir," he replied; "but these Spanish waiters are good for nothing. You can't depend upon them. When they have to wake me early I generally find that I have to get up first and call them to do it. Please, sir," he continued, "I've done my best to wake Captain Broadley, and I can't succeed. He keeps muttering something about dancing and gipsies and Salt Lake City, and is plunging about the bed like an obstinate camel. I can't for the life of me imagine what he's driving at, and feel rather frightened. Would you mind coming, sir, and trying to rouse him? There's no time to lose."

So in I went, and found Broadley in delirium.

"Come, come," I said, "wake up. It's gone eight bells. We've only just time to dress and catch the train."

He opened his eyes vacantly, to close them the next moment in dreamland.

"Belles—belles!" he muttered. "Eight belles—sixteen belles!" He was evidently counting last night's assembly. "Atlantic—Utah—Brigham Young—fine institution—shame, old fellow—tyranny. . . ."

It took five minutes, and our joint efforts, to rouse him. Then all at once he sprang up and turned out, ready for action.

"What were you dreaming about?" I asked.

"I dreamed that we were in the Bay of Biscay," he answered, as readily as possible. "The good old *Defence* was rolling—as she *can* roll. It was Sunday morning. We were all assembled on the upper deck, waiting for the parson to begin service. They had turned me into the clerk, and I had to say Amen, as a reward for good conduct. So I was working myself up into an extra-devout frame of mind, when you came and woke me and spoilt it all. Funny dream, wasn't it?" cried he, looking at me with large eyes full of innocence.

"Very," I answered, in the same spirit. "But now make haste and tub and dress, or you won't have the chance of saying Amen or anything else on board the *Defence*, for we shall lose the train. Like time and tide, it waits for no man."

But we did not lose it. Needless to say that we turned our back

with regret upon the Alhambra and its charmed precincts. At the railway station the train was getting up steam. The bull-fighters of yesterday were on the platform, seeking fresh fields and fights. One or two of them looked worthy of better things, but the greater part did not.

Once more on the way, towards Malaga. We had gone through so much, that a week, not two days, seemed to have elapsed since we had travelled over these lines. One familiar spot after another was passed. At Loja we bought another basket of crayfish, at Bobadilla halted for another breakfast. Between three and four in the afternoon we reached Malaga, settled ourselves at the hotel, and went forth to visit the cathedral, of which we had not yet seen the interior.

It is of Græco-Roman architecture, like that of Granada, but smaller. Of the exterior, little is visible except the large and effective façade, with its splendid arches supported by Corinthian pillars. The cathedral stands on the site of a mosque, dating back to the days of the Moors, but has been built and altered and added to, with a result not very satisfactory. The interior is large and lofty, and is divided into three naves by fluted pillars. The effect is not good, and is cold and lifeless. From the tower, which is nearly 400 feet high, we had a glorious view of the town, the great plain, the hills that protect Malaga from the East, and, above all, the far-stretching, lovely blue waters of the Mediterranean. Coming down was almost as bad as Jacob's Ladder had been at Gibraltar, and seemed as interminable.

Crossing the square, where a few nights ago we had heard those blind players and watched the gambling, I was attracted—as surely as the needle to the pole—by sounds of harmony issuing from a modest clockmaker's. A piano was being really splendidly played. I went up and listened, and everything and everybody was forgotten in the music. Mr. Jago and Broadley stood some fifty yards off, gazing, patiently wondering how long they would have to gaze. At last they approached, and observed mildly, but in a tone of veiled sarcasm, that they would call again for me in an hour's time. They were in want of the courier to act as interpreter, and he had been left at the hotel.

Away they went, and presently out came the clockmaker's wife, and politely asked me to go in and sit down—at least I should hear the music more comfortably. So I entered, and discovered in the musician an interesting lad of sixteen, who had not long learned, yet had all the best and most difficult music at his fingers' ends, played with singular skill and correctness. For an hour and more he charmed me into forgetfulness of time. Before leaving he told me that he was half French, half German; that his own mother was dead—she had been French—and his father wanted to bring him up to the clockmaking. He would like to study at one of the great Conservatoriums of Germany, but feared his father would not consent.

So I argued the matter with the father—who seemed proud of his

son's talent and pleased with any notice—advised him to give up the idea of making his son a watchmaker, and to cultivate the genius he possessed. The old man promised to think about it seriously. Then giving the young musician a name and address, I told him that some years hence, when astonishing and delighting the world, he would come and tell me how he had worked and studied, the battles he had fought, the victories he had won.

By this time the absentees had returned, and we strolled back to the hotel. There, after dinner, in a quiet sitting-room upstairs, we listened to a young inhabitant of Malaga, who was said to be one



THE ALHAMBRA.

of the best guitar players in Spain—and no doubt is so. Pale, melancholy, and refined, his appearance bespoke our sympathies whilst his playing charmed us. Moment after moment passed, beguiled by his airs and improvisations, until the hour struck for the steamer.

Upon this the gentleman who had introduced the player to us insisted that he should go on board also. It was a happy thought. Upon the water, in the moonlight of the soft summer night, we listened to sounds and strains full of poetry and refinement, and plaintive airs full of tender charm and sympathy. It was our closing impression of Malaga, and the Alhambra,—this guitar playing on the deck of the French steamer, in the brilliant moonbeams that lighted up the calm, tideless waters of the Mediterranean; whilst

the sweet sad strains, lovely, dreamy and romantic, floated over the surface, and lost themselves in the dark warm skies above. A fitting termination to a succession of days and experiences that come only once and again in a lifetime.

The steamer started on her way. She was large and palatial compared with the little cockle-shell that had brought us down—yet brought us safely. There were cabins and berths ad libitum, and we were glad to turn in. Four o'clock the next morning found us at Gibraltar, alongside the Reserve Squadron, waiting for "Pratique" to present us with a clean bill of health and permission to return to our vessels.

The boat was going on to Tangiers, and some of us—ready to do or die—determined, as there was time, to cross over and see the wonderful old place that has retained unchanged the ways and whims, the manners and customs of a thousand years ago.

How we fared and what we saw there must be the subject of the next paper.



#### REST SONG.

LET no wild winds rage round this charmed place  
Nor lurid lightnings rend these arching trees;  
But passing clouds and babbling voice of breeze,  
And all things glad and all things full of grace  
For this thy Rest!

Here timid Spring, so fickle yet so sweet,  
Shall bring her wealth of bursting buds and leaves,  
With gleaming swallows flying to their eaves,  
And sights and sounds to make a joyance meet  
For this thy Rest!

When from the east the purple, star-gemmed night  
Soothes, with soft hand, the humid heats of June,  
From brush and brake shall swell the wondrous tune  
Of eager nightingales, secure from sight,  
For this thy Rest!

When honest Autumn, russet-red and gold,  
Comes forth, with gladness of the reapers' song,  
Here let the waning sun-light linger long,  
And starry flowers, though all without be cold,  
For this thy Rest!

Sad white-robed Winter here shall stay his hand,  
And fair frost-feathers on this grass shall fling,  
While from the thorn the robin's voice shall sing  
His wistful music of the Far-off Land  
For this thy Rest!

T. S. CUNNINGHAM.



## MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

BY MARY GRACE WIGHTWICK, AUTHOR OF "IN LANDS OF PALM."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD.

THOROLD was passing up and down the sunny but somewhat limited quarter-deck walk in his uncle's garden, reading his *Times* in a desultory sort of way, and listening for the first stroke of the bells which were to announce the transformation of Rose Egerton into Rose Kane.

Five minutes after five minutes passed. The wedding had been fixed for ten o'clock, that the bridal pair might cross the Channel that same afternoon. It was long past that hour, but still no sound disturbed the quiet of the Close. Suddenly Thorold perceived his Aunt coming out of the house and hurrying towards him at a brisk pace, her round eyes more widely open than usual, and agitation expressed on every feature.

"John! John! What do you think has happened? Such a scandal! How will Lady Mary bear it—so proud as she is!"

Thorold crushed his newspaper together and looked up, as much roused as his aunt could wish.

"What is it? Nothing to do with—with Olive?"

"Oh, no. With all her faults, Olive would never have done such a thing!" Thorold's brow cleared. "It is her sister. There will be no wedding—at least, not here. She eloped this morning with Captain Kane."

"Aunt! Is this true; or only some gossip's detestable fabrication?"

"True! the news is all round the Close by this time.—John! where are you going?"

"To see the Archdeacon."

"Of course! of course. But ah! John, what a time to bring them more bad news."

Indeed, Thorold had all the morning been dreading the task he had taken upon himself, and was not in the best of spirits as he walked across the Close, meeting on his way two or three carriages filled with people in gala costume, the last of the guests hurrying away from the interrupted festivities. His ring at the open front door was unheeded, the domestics being probably engaged somewhere in the back regions, gossiping over the events of the morning. After waiting some minutes he grew impatient, and entered unannounced.

Through the half-open dining-room door he caught a glimpse of the untasted banquet; flowers, fruit, the neglected wedding-cake towering up amongst them, a snowy splendour. A basket of now useless bridal favours lay overturned on the hall-table. A manservant came hurrying past him carrying a portmanteau, then Colonel Kane's own man with a hat-box and some rugs, which he placed in a close carriage that had just stopped at the gate.

Not wishing to encounter the unfortunate bridegroom, Thorold turned aside into the breakfast-room close by, which he imagined to be unoccupied. But no; moving to and fro with restless step was Olive, still in her bridesmaid's dress of pale cashmere, her face deathly white, her hands tightly clasped together. She came to meet him mechanically, seeming to think it a matter of course he should be there even on such a day.

"You have heard?" she asked, with averted face, as he paused, speechless.

"The facts, but no particulars. You must forgive my intrusion at such a time, but—I wished to speak to the Archdeacon." He had hoped that his appearance might have aroused some apprehension, which would have prepared her for his ill-news. Her utter unconsciousness made his heart sink.

"He is waiting to say good-bye to Colonel Kane when he leaves my mother."

"And how is Lady Mary?"

The pity in his tone was almost more than Olive could bear. If Lady Mary could have heard herself spoken of compassionately—and by John Thorold!

"She is calm and composed as usual, though the first shock was terrible. A telegram arrived half-an-hour ago. They—Captain Kane and Rose—were married this morning at nine o'clock."

"Not here?"

"No; at Woodchurch, about six miles off. Rose stole away before seven this morning and met him there. She had begged not to be disturbed till the last moment, and we never discovered her absence until I went to her room at nine. My mother would explain everything to the guests and dismiss them herself. It was dreadful to see her moving so calmly from one to another in her dignified way, but with a face like marble—so white and still."

She took another turn across the room, for her composure was failing her. This trouble of theirs, which brought disgrace on their fair name had, as Thorold knew, its special bitterness for the proud Egertons. He thought of some lines he had read somewhere:

"In all the ills we bore

We grieved, we sighed, we wept, we never blushed before!"

Steps were heard in the hall. Olive, who was near the window, turned even paler than before, and shrank into the shadow of the curtain, as Colonel Kane passed it with rapid step and hat pressed

down over his eyes, sprang into the waiting carriage and was driven away. The bridegroom! He who should have left that door in joy and triumph! Olive covered her face with her hands. Thorold longed for the right to try and comfort her, but he dared not intrude upon that proud and tearless grief.

The sound of voices was heard approaching, and Olive started up. "I must go to my mother."

But as she spoke the door opened and Lady Mary herself came in. Thorold moved aside with a silent bow, but she advanced and gave him her hand with gracious stateliness, although he read in her absent eyes that her thoughts were far away. He summoned up courage, for he felt that this opportunity of breaking his ill-tidings must not be lost.

While he stood hesitating how to begin Lady Mary addressed him. For all the blow she had received the old haughtiness was perceptible in her tone.

"You find us in some confusion, Mr. Thorold. Circumstances have put a stop to our festivities, as Close gossip has probably already told you."

"Yes, and I must ask your pardon, Lady Mary, for intruding my presence upon you at such a time, but it is my duty. There is some ill-news which you ought to know."

She sat upright in her chair and fixed upon him a rigid gaze which made the words falter upon his tongue.

"Ill-news! of her who has disgraced us all and made us a jest and a mockery! What more ill-news can there be to hear of her?"

Olive stole up, chilled by those bitter words, and touched her mother's arm imploringly.

"Lady Mary! I know nothing of your *daughter*, it is ——" His emphasis struck the keynote of his news.

"Not Miles?" she whispered, hoarsely, starting forward.

His face answered the question before he spoke. "There has been fighting in South Africa. The telegram reports Captain Egerton as severely wounded. Oh! Lady Mary, take courage! Hope is left to you. It is not with you as with some whose homes have been made desolate at a stroke."

His concluding words fell upon unheeding ears. Lady Mary had fallen back fainting, and it was an unconscious form which Olive supported so tenderly. Thorold, at a sign from her, rang the bell and hastened in search of assistance more effectual than his own. Lady Mary's maid was quickly on the spot, but it was long before her efforts and Olive's could re-awaken her to the consciousness which was followed by a wave of miserable recollection.

A full half-hour had elapsed, which Thorold spent with the Archdeacon, before the maid came announcing that her mistress was better and wished to see Mr. Thorold if he were still in the house. Thorold looked at the Archdeacon, who nodded an assent.

"Go, go; she will not be gainsaid when she has set her mind on a thing."

Lady Mary was lying upon a low couch near the fire, looking as though years had passed over her head since a few hours ago. Olive stood close by, watching her wistfully.

"Mr. Thorold, will you show me that telegram?"

He pulled the *Times* from his pocket, silently found the paragraph, and handed it to her. She looked at it a moment, then it dropped from her nerveless hand.

"It is of no use, my eyes are dim," she said, faintly. "Olive, you must read it to me."

Olive obeyed.

"And there is nothing more? You are sure—not a word?"

"Nothing, mother. When shall we hear?" she questioned of Thorold.

"In a few days, perhaps, some news of the wounded, but no particulars for some time."

Lady Mary lay still, with closed eyes. Olive was beginning to fear a return of the faintness, but presently she opened them and spoke again.

"That poor girl—is she still here?"

Olive instantly divined whither her thoughts had flown.

"Viola, mamma? She went to Miss Hammond—don't you remember?"

"Does she know?"

"I blurted the news out suddenly when I came in last night, not knowing how it would affect her," Thorold confessed, guiltily.

Lady Mary half raised herself upon her elbow. "And she knew when I dismissed her so cruelly?"

"Yes. I had begged her not to betray the news, and she kept her own counsel bravely."

Lady Mary said nothing, but John saw that unwonted tears stood in her eyes. "Is Miss Romaine still with you?" ventured Olive, timidly.

"Oh, yes; my aunt has asked her to remain a day or two, until we can hear more."

"She must come back," murmured Lady Mary to herself. Then suddenly breaking down she cried out: "Ah! Olive! I denied my boy's last wish, and who knows if I shall ever have the power of granting him another!"

Finding that he could be of no further use Thorold took leave, promising to return with the evening papers to the anxious mother and sister.

Another watcher, no less torn with suspense, was passing the weary hours as best she might, now pacing the room in restless impatience, now trying to rouse herself to listen to her kind

hostess, who would look in occasionally with fragments of Close gossip, or conjectures about the startling events of the day.

It was evident that the town talk did not spare Lady Mary. Her haughty independence of character had won her many enemies, who, now in the hour of her downfall, rushed in to administer each one the midge-like stings they would not have dared at any other time. Whether or no in her secret heart Miss Hammond were inclined to agree with this censure of the pride and exclusiveness which had met with such a fall, she did not vent her opinions in hearing of her guest. Viola would not have borne to hear Lady Mary blamed, though wounded to the core herself by her harsh, cruel words, which stung all the more deeply coming from Miles's mother: the mother towards whom her heart went out so wistfully. And now, even Olive had deserted her. Oh! the bitter disappointment of that rejected appeal! As she thought of it her heart hardened against the friend whose sympathy had failed her in the hour of need.

Viola found it difficult to realise that all her hopes of winning her way into the hearts of Miles's people had vanished once and for all. With their love to encourage and support her, her terrible trial might have been comparatively easy to bear, but now she must tread her *Via Dolorosa* alone. In a few days more she must leave even the temporary refuge which now sheltered her, and go forth into a world void of all friendly sympathy, to wait—wait—wait.

Of the awful possibility which lay upon the other side of that dreary gulf of suspense and anxiety she dared not even think. That could only be faced in a strength not her own, a strength which even now she was seeking in her solitude, with a childlike faith that, although all other supports might fail, there still remained to her "the Everlasting Arms."

Viola was no stranger to sorrow. Only a short year ago that blow had fallen upon her whose lesser stings of shame and disgrace had been deadened in the greater grief of its dreadful tragedy.

Then into the very midst of her desolate loneliness had come Miles Egerton, with his chivalrous love, interpenetrating her sorrow, thrusting it through and through with threads of happiness, which gleamed all the brighter for their dark background. How well she remembered that winter's afternoon, when she sat in her ruined home, dressed for the first time after days of illness and prostration in the black draperies which yet were but pale emblems of her sorrow, and he had come in and surprised her in the midst of her grieving, and begged her to give him the right to comfort her. In his generous chivalry he had pleaded as humbly, as diffidently, with as much deference as though she were the Queen upon her throne and he the beggar at her feet. And when her heart was already on his side how could she withstand his importunity! In her days of happy prosperity, on the pleasant lawns of Fairhurst, he had always



been a welcome guest, preferred above all others. Many then had envied Miles Egerton the favour of the rich banker's heiress, who now that she was heiress no longer, but ruined, with a cloud upon her name, passed by on the other side and ignored her existence. But he was loyal still, and she could not send him from her.

Viola's sorrow and joy were only a few weeks old when Captain Egerton suddenly received orders for South Africa, with the tempting offer of an appointment on the staff of his mother's old friend, General B. In spite of the compliment paid him, never was summons more unwelcome. He could not bear the thought of leaving Viola without even the protection of his name, and hurried down to St. Brenda's to enlist his mother's sympathy for his betrothed and to gain her consent to an immediate marriage. But notwithstanding all his eloquence, Lady Mary's determined opposition justified poor Viola's misgivings. The immediate result of her son's visit was a letter in her own hand to Miss Romaine, despatched unknown to Miles while he still lingered at St. Brenda's.

It was laconic, courteous, to the point; an appeal to Viola's generosity to release her son from an engagement which, if fulfilled, must ruin his prospects for life. If, considering himself bound in honour, he should refuse to accept his liberty, she then begged Viola to give him the opportunity for reflection before taking such an irrevocable step, asking her, as a favour, to hold no correspondence with Captain Egerton during his absence from England. If both stood the test of separation, and, on his return, he chose to renew his suit as the result not of impulse but of sober judgment, Lady Mary promised to withdraw all open opposition, although she could never willingly receive as a daughter "one whose personal qualities, however estimable, were so greatly outweighed by the disadvantages of her position, &c." Viola had the cold, cruel letter still, and read it over from time to time, always with the same icy chill which she had felt on first perusing it. The thick uncompromising paper, bearing the Egerton arms on a lozenge, was becoming soft and pliable with much unfolding.

Viola had a whole day for reflection before Miles's return. By that time her mind was made up. She spread the letter before him and gently told him that so it must be, with a sweet, yet firm decision, which forbade remonstrance. She made him send a message from her to his mother, promising compliance with her wishes; and with a brave smile and inward tears bade him go away, and, for his own sake, forget her if he could.

"But you will not, Miles—it is that which makes the parting easy. You will come back faithful to me still, and the probation over, your mother will be satisfied, and we shall live happy ever after, as the story-books say."

She tried to reassure him with a semblance of unusual gaiety, but Miles groaned to himself, and could not be deceived.

"I cannot forgive my mother for placing you in such a position and taking advantage of your unselfishness. It is all such bosh and nonsense. If she only knew you—prejudice apart—she must learn to love you."

"And who knows but that while you are away accident may bring us together? More improbable things have happened."

Miles shook his head. He was not to be talked out of his desponding mood so easily. To go so far away out of sight and hearing was a sore trial, and it was well that the short notice given him left little time to dwell upon it. For those few days Viola managed to keep up an appearance of cheerfulness, but when the strain was at an end, and the last good-bye had been said, the reaction was all the more terrible. A great heart-breaking burden of sorrow lay at Lady Mary's door during the weeks that followed.

Viola, by this time, had left the luxurious home, haunted of late by so many painful memories. She had laid aside with the remnants of his wealth even the very name of the rich banker that was now so unhappily notorious; and calling herself by her mother's maiden name of Keith, had hidden herself alike from the comments and pity of her acquaintance, in one of the quiet old streets round about Bloomsbury, where she could remain insignificant and unnoticed. Near relations she had none, friends but few, and of these, none of whom she was willing to ask a favour, but a kind-hearted elderly governess in whose home she found a temporary refuge.

It was there that a few weeks after her arrival she came across one of Lady Mary's all too frequent advertisements for a Lady Companion to an invalid, and obeying a sudden impulse resolved to seize the opportunity of realising her prediction, which fortune seemed purposely to have placed in her way. She had heard enough from Miles of Mrs. Carr's peculiarities to be convinced that she was entering upon a difficult undertaking, but with so much depending upon success she would not be deterred from attempting the task. Anything was preferable to her present aimless, idle life; she had already determined to work, and if she must go among strangers, who so near to her as the family in St. Brenda's Close, of whom Miles always spoke so lovingly! A few letters, a pleasant interview with Lady Mary's sister, Lady Anne Conyers, in Berkeley Square, and all was arranged. Viola entered upon her duties as Mrs. Carr's companion, and upon her self-imposed task of winning the affections of Miles Egerton's mother and sisters.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### RECONCILED.

It was already dusk when Thorold returned to the dark old house in the corner of the Close, and having asked for Olive, waited long and patiently in the empty drawing-room for her appear-

ance. At last she came in, moving languidly, and looking the mere wreck of herself as she sank wearily into the nearest chair.

"I see you have no better news for us," she began, in a desponding tone, reading his grave face. "Poor mamma!"

"I hope Lady Mary is better?" he asked, anxiously.

"Indeed, no. She seems quite feverish this evening, and my uncle is trying to persuade her to see a doctor. Then she alternately blames herself for thwarting poor Miles's attachment to Viola, and grieves over her absence. If only that wretched Captain Kane had never written that malicious letter! My aunt, too, is furious with my mother for sending her away—declares that no one else ever served her so well, and that Miles showed his sense in appreciating her, which is more than we could do. Then to hear her abuse poor Rose, and say it is what she always expected of her! I would not go near my aunt to hear such talk, but there is no one else to look after her, now Viola is gone. Everything seems to go wrong to-day!"

It seemed a relief to unburden her overwrought feelings to so sympathising a listener. But the indulgence could be but brief. In a few moments she started up.

"I must take mamma some tea. Will you ring the bell, please? I told them to have it ready."

"And what have you had yourself? Anything since morning?"

"Yes—no; I really forget,—someone brought me a biscuit, I think."

"Then we will make sure. You must let me get you a glass of wine before you do anything more. Sit still. I shall find it."

He returned successful from his forage, and waited on her while she ate some biscuits and drank the wine.

"There, now you look a little more like yourself. Don't neglect your own health in nursing Lady Mary," he said kindly, almost tenderly. "And now I must go home. Miss Keith (I can't learn to call her Miss Romayne) will be waiting anxiously for news."

"Ah! poor Viola! If I could but see her a moment and ask her to forgive my unkindness last night. I was wrong to be so hard upon her!"

The confession was a great deal coming from Olive, who so seldom in her life had deigned to say, "*Peccavi*!" But where her affections were concerned, Olive was all warmth and generosity, as John had discovered long since. He told himself that he was glad—yes, *glad*—that his brief holiday at St. Brenda's came to an end on the morrow. Olive was more dangerous to his peace of mind now, in this broken mood of humility, than in all her pride of beauty and high spirits. He took the image of that pale, wan face, those sorrowful eyes, back with him across the Close, and it dwelt with him all the evening, coming between him and his book so that he could not read a word of it.

It seemed only a natural embodiment of his mental visions when, going out into the hall later on, he met a rush of wintry wind from the opening front door; and borne in as it were upon that dreary blast, there entered Olive herself, looking only more weary and colourless than her pictured presence in his mind.

He hastily went to meet her, half-fearing some new misfortune.

"Can I speak to Viola a minute?" she asked, eagerly. "I am afraid it is very late, but if Miss Hammond will excuse me, I should so like—indeed, I *must* see her."

He hesitated. "Miss Keith is in the drawing-room with my aunt; but if you will come upstairs ——"

Olive's wan face flushed slightly.

"I would rather have seen her alone, but she might refuse me admittance, and I cannot risk that. Lead the way, please."

Thorold felt very compassionate for Olive as she climbed the stairs wearily after him, for he knew what this visit cost one so proud and high-spirited. He doubted, too, what her reception might be, for he had gathered that Viola's feelings had been deeply wounded.

However, there was little time for Olive either to repent or grow nervous, for in a few seconds they were at the drawing-room door, which Thorold hastily threw open. Miss Hammond, who had been nodding decorously over her book, looked up in sleepy wonder at the interruption. Viola greeted him with one of the languid smiles which, in these days, were her nearest approach to cheerfulness; but when her eyes fell upon the visitor whom he was ushering in, the smile died out and she drew herself up stiffly. Miss Hammond could not have believed her gentle visitor to be capable of such haughtiness, and, tender-hearted little woman that she was, felt quite sorry for Miss Egerton as she came forward almost humbly.

In some precipitation she got up to welcome her, turning then to Viola with some faint idea of peace-making. But Viola's cold, rigid face gave her little hope of successful mediation. She had risen and stood drawn up to her full height, with her large dark eyes fixed upon the intruder, upon whom was thus thrown the burden of explanation. Olive took her courage in both hands and made a step forward. "Viola!" she said, softly, holding out her hand. But Viola folded hers tightly together, looking straight before her, stern and rigid still, and Olive was suddenly and painfully reminded that it was now her turn to be a rejected suppliant. The fugitive colour crimsoned her cheek again, but she persisted, feeling braver as the sound of the closing door assured her that they were alone at last.

"Viola!" she cried again. "I have come to ask your pardon for my unkindness last night. Won't you speak to me? Won't you forgive me when we are both so unhappy?" She ventured nearer, trying to catch a glimpse of Viola's averted face. But there was no answer.

"I deserve that you should be angry," she owned, dejectedly, but forgive me, Viola, *for Miles's sake*, if not for my own!" Instinct had taught her the plea most likely to be successful. Viola turned, and the next minute the girls were sobbing in each others' arms. Not all the sorrows of that dreadful day had hitherto wrung a tear from Olive, but now they came thick and fast as she hung on Viola's neck and wept out her grief and shame and misery. Viola could understand. No words were wanted.

Presently Olive found herself in the low chair which her friend had vacated, with Viola on the rug at her feet, holding her hand and stroking it gently from time to time. She heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Ah! Viola, you have given me some little comfort, for it has added to the misery of this most miserable of days to remember my unkind behaviour to you. When you were in such trouble already, too, and bearing it bravely for our sakes!"

"Mr. Thorold came and asked me to help him conceal the news. He little guessed — oh! Olive!" Her head went down into her hands for a moment, and a quiver she could not repress shook her whole frame. Olive stooped over her with a silent caress, which said more than any words.

"I think one blow has deadened the other for me," broke out poor Olive, presently, with a groan. "I don't seem able to realise what has happened, or what shame and disgrace it all means! Oh! Rose! Rose! That wretched Wilfred Kane! What can a life be like begun in such a way!"

"I always mistrusted him," Viola said, slowly, "though often I have blamed myself for unreasonable prejudice. I knew him before — at Fairhurst — and disliked him even then."

"To be sure," said Olive, wondering; "I remember that at first he spoke of you with great admiration." Viola coloured so guiltily that Olive continued: "Why, what is this? Viola! I do believe —"

"Yes; he once asked me to marry him. We were rich then, for it was before my great trouble. When we met again at St. Brenda's he took care to let me know that though his admiration was not changed his intentions were."

"Coward!" exclaimed Olive, indignantly.

"The warning was unnecessary," said Viola, simply, drawing herself up ever so slightly. "My opinion of him was unchanged too. Poor, poor Rose!"

"Poor Rose, indeed, to be so deluded. Oh! Viola! I fear she is the victim of a double treachery! The horrible dread comes over me sometimes that it was not Rose alone, but his uncle's wife that Wilfred Kane wished to entice away! The property is entailed, you know, and he is next heir. If I were Colonel Kane I would marry even now to spite him!"

"He will never do that," said Viola, in a tone of conviction.



"Not a chance of it. And, oh! dreadful to think of, Rose's children—if she have any—may some day profit by Rose's sin! Ah! Viola! this disgrace is the deeper grief of the two! Heaven grant we may be spared more sorrow! It would break my mother's heart."

And now, Viola first ventured to speak Lady Mary's name. There was a conscious change in her voice as she did so, for she recalled her as she had appeared the evening before, giving sentence in her stern, judicial way. "How does she bear it?" she asked, gently.

"The blow of this morning?—better than might have been expected; but this bad news of Miles, coming close upon it, almost crushed her. She is worse this evening,—worn out, yet too restless to sleep. Dr. Moore seems anxious about her. She harasses herself, too about you and Miles, and reproaches herself for what happened last night. Viola, she wants you to come back that she may tell you so."

Viola hastily dropped the hand she held.

"No; I cannot do that, Olive. Things have changed. Lady Mary has dismissed Mrs. Carr's companion. I cannot go back!"

"Not as my aunt's companion, but as one whom we must all love for Miles's sake," whispered Olive, softly.

"Ah! no, Olive! Miles's love has brought me nothing but hate from his people. I once had a hope that Viola Keith might win some little liking for Viola Romaine, but the hope died out as I looked in your mother's face last night. If you could but know the bitter, bitter disappointment!"

"Poor Viola! I understand."

"I had given your mother my promise to hold no correspondence with Miles! but when opportunity offered and I saw her advertisement, how could I resist coming to the one place in all the world where I could hear news of him!—hear at least his name sometimes spoken!"

"Dear Viola, I did not think it had gone so far! We have been cruel. But my mother blames herself as much as you can blame her; a trouble like this brings one face to face with the realities of life. At least be forgiving, and come and speak to her. You know my mother's pride. It costs her something to ask you this. Don't let her have to ask in vain!"

Viola was touched, and though she still hesitated, Olive saw by her moistened eyes and softening features that the victory was won.

Thorold was scarcely surprised when, in place of one, there presently appeared on the stairs *two* cloaked and muffled figures.

"Dear Miss Hammond, I am going to run away for half an hour," said Viola to her greatly astonished hostess. "Don't wait up for me. I am sure Mr. Thorold will bring me safely back."

For John had silently taken down his hat and was waiting to escort them. Almost in silence the trio crossed the Close, and with

a mingling of many feelings, Viola re-entered the house she had so lately quitted in disgrace.

The household, it was evident, had not yet recovered the shock of the morning; it was still out of gear, and the confusion caused by the sudden illness of the mistress, who was its mainspring, was visible everywhere. Doors were yawning open, shutters were unshut. The two girls stumbled up the dim, unlighted stairs to the corridor outside Lady Mary's room. The door opened and her maid came out, carrying a tray. With the quickened perceptions of an invalid, Lady Mary heard the steps and voices outside.

"Who is there?" she called, impatiently.

Then as the door was pushed wider and admitted a dark, cloaked figure. "Olive! Is that you? Have you seen her?" She raised herself upon her elbow and waited eagerly for the answer, and then someone, who was not Olive, glided forward and throwing back the hood of her ulster, showed the pale, wistful face of Viola Romaine.

A moment she stood there hesitating to approach, but Lady Mary put out her hand with a broken cry: "Child! child! what have I to do any more with pride! You love him, too; we will weep and wait together!" Then Viola, throwing herself upon her knees by the bedside, took the slim white hand in hers and covered it with tears and kisses.

## CHAPTER XV.

### NEWS FROM THE WAR.

OF COURSE Viola went back to the Corner House, and became very necessary to Lady Mary in the weeks of fever and prostration which followed that sad wedding-day.

It was grievous to see one usually so full of decision and energy to plan for others—the strong-willed woman, who held the reins of government with a firm hand as absolute ruler in her little circle—prostrate now in mind and body, dependent for the tiniest service upon the two young nurses who served her with such unwearied devotion. The poor Archdeacon, deprived of the staff upon which he was wont to lean, would come with noiseless steps and a rueful countenance to look and wonder over her, and go away again, more depressed than before, to his musty hieroglyphics.

Anxiety with Mrs. Carr, on the contrary, took a different turn. The presence of suffering greater than her own subdued her, and to poor Olive's great relief she put up patiently with neglect, and was content with the few occasional visits which were all either Viola or herself could manage. Mrs. Carr was really attached to her sister-in-law, and showed it now in Lady Mary's time of trouble by keeping her personal grievances in the background.

To Viola she showed unexpected favour. She had chosen to espouse her cause from the first, and having elected her position

clung to it with characteristic persistence ; and from the hour of Viola's return, treated her as one who was soon to become a member of the family. This conduct embarrassed Viola, however she might be gratified by Mrs. Carr's preference. Her position just now seemed full of perplexities, and she was glad to be shut away in Lady Mary's sick-room, apart from the necessity of solving them. There at least she was at home, and loved, and appreciated, as every look and touch told her continually. The guerdon for which she had striven so hard was earned at last ! Yet words there were few, while Lady Mary lay day after day in a state of alternate fever and prostration, only living, as it seemed, for those occasional reports from the Cape which told Miles's nearest and dearest no more than they told all the world. "*Wounded doing well.*" "*Wounded progressing favourably.*" That was all for days and days which seemed never ending.

Then one dreadful morning came an exception. "*Wounded going on well ; all but Captain Egerton, who is in a critical state.*"

What tears were shed in secret over that telegram by Olive and Viola !—tears all the more bitter that they must be hidden from Lady Mary. And oh ! the relief as the bulletins began to improve once more, and allowed hope to steal into their hearts again !

Public sympathy was not wanting during these days of trial, and many and frequent were the calls and letters and messages. But what pleased Olive and her uncle more than all was the kind attention shown by Colonel Kane. Not only did he several times enquire in person, but almost every day his servant was to be seen at the Archdeacon's door asking the latest bulletin of the invalid, or leaving a basket of some choice fruits or flowers which his master hoped would please Lady Mary. And though a sting lurked among the fragrant blossoms, and a taste of gall flavoured the luscious grapes, Colonel Kane's silently received gifts were appreciated none the less.

Of course it was natural that Mrs. Warburton should make use of the present excellent opportunity of bemoaning her "dear cousin's ill-fortune," which she declared went to her heart : she could think of nothing else but the trouble which had befallen those dear relations of hers in the Close.

Indeed her anxiety to prove kinship to the Egertons by an extra amount of sympathy very nearly impaled Mrs. Warburton upon the horns of a dilemma. A day or two after Rose's ill-fated wedding, Mrs. Warburton returning from an expedition to leave an early card of enquiry at Lady Mary's door, found her drawing-room occupied by a certain Mrs. McKerrel and her brother, Captain Smythe, both welcome visitors, as coming from the Barracks.

Sinking into the nearest chair, their hostess immediately began upon the sad history of the Egerton troubles, deploring that she had been completely upset by them. Mrs. McKerrel shook her head sympathisingly, extracted one or two utterly false particulars from

Mrs. Warburton, "who, of course, being Lady Mary's own cousin, ought to know," as she confided to a friend later; and then ended sadly: "My brother had hoped to see you all at the Infantry Sports this afternoon and the tea at the Mess Room afterwards, but I fear it is useless to speak of it now you are in such trouble about the Egertons. You do not, of course, even care to think of such frivolities!"

For a moment even Mrs. Warburton was at a non-plus. Blood, it is true, is thicker than water, but the idea of losing such an opportunity for her beautiful Tilly and her entertaining Bella was not to be contemplated for a moment. At last her native wit came to her rescue and extricated her from her embarrassing position.

Mrs. Warburton drew a fine embroidered handkerchief from her pocket and wafted it gently across her eyes.

"Indeed, dear Mrs. McKerrel, you are most kind to give us your sympathy; it is only another proof of your good feeling; and if it would be any consolation to my poor cousin I would gladly abjure all gaieties and, so to speak, cover myself with sackcloth and ashes. But why should we cherish our grief? It is our duty to make the best of things in this life of pain and suffering! My dear cousin will never know it! And so, as you are so kind as to ask us, we will make an effort and come to you, my dear Mrs. McKerrel!"

One morning as Viola was passing the library, the Archdeacon came out, holding an open letter in his hand.

"There, my dear, you may read that if you like, and take it upstairs with you. It will be good medicine for Lady Mary."

The letter was from General B. He gave a tolerably favourable report of his young aide-de-camp's condition, but deplored that he would be quite unfit for active service for many months to come, and would therefore be invalided home as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to bear the journey. He was quite unable to write himself; the injury to his sword-arm had rendered it useless for the present. General B. went on to give a few particulars of the way in which Miles had received his wound, speaking warmly of his cool heroism, which had excited everyone's admiration: "The troops, retreating before the enemy, were crossing a river; Captain Egerton had himself nearly gained the shore, when, looking back, he saw a brother officer, a young fellow who had but lately joined, left wounded and alone upon the opposite bank, with the Zulus swarming down the hill upon him. Turning his horse, he went back, and dismounting, lifted his helpless comrade up before him, and struggled a second time through the river, amid a hail of weapons. A blow from an assegai disabled his sword-arm, a second struck him on the shoulder, making him reel in his saddle; but wounded and disabled, he struggled on until both he and his burden were safe among their comrades. Even then he would not suffer the surgeon to look to his wounds until his friend

had first been attended to." General B. added some warm praise of the young soldier, which deeply gratified his uncle. Then came the conclusion: "I intend recommending Captain Egerton for the Victoria Cross. Never was honour better deserved."

Viola read on in an April-like confusion of alternate tears and smiles. Then, clasping tight the precious letter, she hurried to Lady Mary's room.

The invalid lay in her usual listless state, propped up with pillows. Very wan and weary was the beautiful face upon which Viola gazed so tenderly. As she hung over her, Lady Mary roused herself with an effort, and opened her eyes.

"Dear Lady Mary, I have something to show you—a letter from South Africa—a letter about Miles!"

Her eyes were moist and glistening; surely no bad news could be announced by such an eager face? Lady Mary held out her hand for the letter, but soon returned it with a sigh as she sank back upon her pillows.

"You must read it to me, Viola."

It was not easy to obey the command. Viola's voice was unsteady, and once or twice threatened to fail her altogether, but the sight of those great hungering eyes hanging on her words helped her on to the end. Then she broke down and buried her face in the bed-clothes in uncontrollable weeping. Lady Mary caressed her tenderly, but she herself shed not a tear. A proud light had dawned in her eyes; a look which had long been a stranger there.

"I am not surprised!" she cried, exultingly. "My boy comes of a race of heroes; it is only what I should have expected of him. Ah, Viola! how proud we shall feel of our soldier when he comes back to us!"

The letter seemed to have restored spirit and energy to the drooping mother. The load of humiliation was lightened. She felt that she could lift her head once more among her fellows. There yet remained something to make life worth living. That same afternoon she expressed a wish to sit up for an hour or two, and although when the time came her strength did not prove equal to her reviving spirit, the very desire to make the effort was a hopeful sign, which re-assured them all. She had never been in immediate danger, but there was continued anxiety lest the prolonged illness should exhaust her enfeebled powers.

Once, on one of her bad days, she had summoned her brother-in-law to her bedside and laid her commands upon him on no account to send for her daughter Rose, even if she should become worse without hope of recovery.

"I could not bear it. Remember, whatever happens, I will not have her here to see the ruin she has wrought. Do you understand me, Archdeacon?"

"No, I don't understand you, Mary, and neither as a clergyman



nor as a brother will I promise obedience to your wishes," the Archdeacon burst out hotly, roused for once to rebellion. "You are in no danger at present, and, please heaven, you won't be. I hope you will live many years yet, and have time to change your mind. Our hearts are sore and bitter enough against Rose now, but some day, who knows? we may learn to forgive what we can never forget. I pray that day may come!"

He went without another word and never again during her illness did Lady Mary mention her daughter's name. A week or two after Rose's marriage a letter had arrived from her addressed to her mother. When Olive, inwardly trembling for the consequences, ventured to give it to her, Lady Mary glanced at the envelope, recognised the familiar writing, and without a moment's hesitation tore it into fragments, unread. The wound had gone too deep to be quickly healed, and for many months to come not even her nearest and dearest dared touch upon it ever so lightly. The merest passing allusion which recalled Rose to her mind was torture to Lady Mary's proud and sensitive nature. The pretty, graceful girl, who had been a favourite with everyone, seemed to have dropped out of their lives as though she had never existed. Captain Kane had fortunately been summoned to rejoin the head-quarters of his regiment in Ireland, so that Rose was at least spared the pain of a return to the neighbourhood of her old home and her former lover.

It was more than a year later, just as the Hussars were on the point of leaving for India, that at last Colonel Kane's repeated intercession prevailed with Lady Mary, and she consented to see her daughter, and bid her farewell. It was a trying visit for all concerned.

Rose came alone; so Lady Mary had stipulated. Miles (it was long after he had returned, and we are anticipating for a moment) received his sister in the hall with a grave kiss, and Miles's wife took her hand in a gentle clasp which would fain have expressed her pity. The Archdeacon was on the threshold of the drawing-room ready with a re-assuring welcome. Then leading her to where Lady Mary stood stately and majestic at the further end of the room, he went away and left the two together, that there might be no witnesses of that brief and painful interview. What could words avail to undo the past, or heal the wound which Rose's own hand had dealt to those who loved her best? Rose said little of herself, or her present life; if she were unhappy, she kept her own counsel and never betrayed it. After all, we do but reap as we have sown! Once when she would have said something of Wilfred, Lady Mary stopped her.

"Hush! Rose; I wish to hear nothing of your husband. He is your husband, and I say no more; but never mention his name to me. I cannot hear it with patience."

Rose began to cry softly. The estrangement was even worse than she had feared. Wilfred had not prepared her for so stern a reception when he advised her "to go and make it up with her

people." But Lady Mary kept severe guard over herself until the time for separation came. Then the long-repressed pain broke out.

"Oh, Rose! How could you! how could you!" she groaned, as for a moment she bowed her head over the golden one beside her. Rose clung to her mother in an agony as she begged her forgiveness.

Lady Mary raised her head and showed a face pale with emotion, which bore witness to the inward struggle. At last, with a long-drawn sigh, she stooped and kissed Rose's soft cheek gravely, sorrowfully.

"Rose, I must be merciful, as I hope for mercy, but though I *forgive*, no prayers can ever make me *forget*; no tears can ever wash out the memory of what has been. I pray, Rose, that no child of yours may ever cause you one tithe part of the pain, the shame, the misery your act has heaped on me and all who love you!"

(To be concluded.)



#### IN A GARDEN.

THERE'S a garden of my childhood that I only see in dreams,

Ever sunshine lies upon it, shadows only passing flit:

Thro' the vista of my memory very fair that garden seems,

And I sometimes yearn with longing once again to enter it!

I can smell the lawn's first mowing, and the rich earth freshly turned,

When the Spring's warm-fingered touches woke to life the garden  
beds,

Where the double row of crocus like a golden pathway burned,

And the tulips in the border waved their stately crimson heads.

Where the south wall lured the swallows wheeling up against the blue;

Summer beauty gained upon us ere we knew the Spring begun:

There the pale wisteria clusters tender arms of fragrance threw

Till the white magnolia lifted cups of silver to the sun.

Year by year the blooming orchard lay like snow beneath the moon,

Year by year the chaffinch nested where the moss-grown boughs  
divide,

And her brood upon the branches twittered through the dawns of June,

Till the growing apples reddened under August's smile of pride.

Spring and ever-radiant Summer and full Autumn hold it fast,

My enchanted garden, whither fancy leads me back to-day,

Never Winter falls upon it, for the pictures of the past,

God be thanked, are happy pictures, and their skies for ever gay.

Only when across life's highway comes the scent of country briar,

Or of wafted honeysuckle, westward borne, and cold with dew;

Then the longing for my garden fills me with such strong desire,

That my soul is faint within me for the sunshine that I knew!

G. B. STUART.

## THE BLUE CHAMBER AT ORMESCLIFFE.

TWO pretty women sat talking by firelight one autumn evening.

A tea-table, splendid with old Crown Derby, and a satin cosy embroidered to match cocked on the top of the old silver teapot, stood between them, and the third volume of the last popular novel lay on the wolf-skin rug just where Lynette had dropped it, when even her bright eyes could read no longer.

She was a slim, fair-faced girl, with outlines a thought too sharp for prettiness, alert and sensitive to the finger-tips. Her keen, bright face took a dozen varying shades of expression while she spoke as many words; her hair waved crisply, her eyes were grey, dilating and deepening with the intensity of her meaning.

She was kneeling on the rug tormenting the big burning log in the grate with a toy brass poker, and watching the blue flames and red sparks come and go while she talked.

Her sister listened behind her peacock fan, calmly and reasonably, as was her wont.

"No marriage can ever be happy," declared Lynette, in her thin, musical, childish voice, "without perfect love and trust."

"I think I have heard something like that before," remarked Mrs. Featherstone, in her full contralto. "Besides, I never disputed the statement, did I?"

"Why, Lola! Didn't you say that a wife had a right to a man's present and future. but his past was his own?"

"Something of the kind," Lola admitted. "I also said that it was a queer way of displaying your perfect trust in a man to insist on knowing all his secrets."

"Trust me not at all, or all in all!" quoted Lynette, emphatically.

"And a nice position Merlin got into by acting on the advice," commented Lola.

Lynette shrugged her shoulders, and gave the log a furious blow, sending sparks in showers about. Lola meditatively stroked the soft plush of her tea-gown with her dimpled, white hand, glancing approvingly at the sparkle of the gems that encrusted it, and then spoke with authority from the depths of her basket chair.

"My dear child, it was a wise woman who said, 'Never insist on being your husband's first love; be content if you are sure of being his *last*.'"

"I would never set eyes on John again if I were not perfectly certain of being the one and the other!" Lynette replied, her colour rising, and her eyes darkening. "Our lives are to be one, with one opinion, one ideal, one set of tastes and feelings ——"

"Whose? Yours or his? And how about yachting?" interposed Mrs. Featherstone.

"Lola! When you *know* I have ordered three yachting suits for my trousseau—a blue, and a white, and a Galatea! Of course I shall try to go with him. I can but be wretched; but if *he's* pleased it's all right."

"You are a good little thing, Lynette," said her sister, affectionately; "but you see agreement on *every* point is physically impossible. I wish you would admit the principle in all things. It will save a world of disappointment and dispersed illusions."

Lynette's eyes grew dewy, and her lip quivered.

"Let me keep my illusions while I can, then. You and Mark may have your views of married happiness. John and I would rather come to grief in striving after a high ideal than sneak through life contented with having realised a low one."

Lola was silent. She had never consciously formed any ideal, and wouldn't have distressed herself by striving after it if she had, on any consideration. She had a beautiful, well-ordered home; a pretty little year-old baby son; a kind, considerate husband; and was the handsomest woman in the county. How *could* her life be possibly improved on?"

"I beg your pardon, Lola!" broke out Lynette, impulsively. "I didn't mean—that is, I didn't think—I oughtn't to have said so to you. What a blundering, egotistical wretch I am!"

Lola's great brown eyes opened wide in utter bewilderment; then, following Lynette's glance across the room, became enlightened and half-closed their curly fringed lids in perfect indifference. A half length portrait hung on the wall facing the fire. A portrait of a pretty woman, of a certain order of prettiness, the sort that curiously enough is never admitted by other women, however attractive men may find it. Ruddy brown hair, coiled high upon the head, after the fashion of some ten years ago, and rippling across a low white forehead; long eyes of a bright blue, with half-closed, heavy white eyelids; a small mouth, with full, red lips, and a soft round chin with a dimple like a baby's.

"Did you think I should be sensitive about Mark's first wife?" Lola asked, amusedly. "I had forgotten that she ever existed, for the moment."

Lynette frowned incredulously.

"I should hate the sight of her. Why do you keep that portrait there, Lola?"

"Because I am so much better looking, my dear—better in every way, and it serves to remind Mark of the fact. I like to keep her there in perpetual comparison with me—to her disadvantage." Lola sat upright and spoke quite animatedly—for her. "When Mark and I first came home here, he asked me to re-arrange everything as I wished, and I saw him glance at the portrait. I knew what he meant,

and said directly that I should prefer to leave Lady Mildred there. It would stop unkind tongues, I said, if that was still kept in the place of honour. Mark thought I was an angel, of course, and agreed. If I fancied he still loved her I would burn it this minute; but as he detests her memory as cordially as I can wish—keep your place, Lady Mildred!"

And Lola waved a salute that was half a menace to her pictured rival, and laughed a low, little laugh; then, sinking back with her usual lazy grace, demanded, "Some more tea; not quite so sweet, please, dear."

Lynette was quite accustomed to her sister's sudden outbursts—of passion, mirth, or devotion, as the case might be, and poured the tea out carefully, with her ears on the alert the while to distinguish and identify a confused sound of voices and horses' feet without. A ring at the bell—an opening door—a heavy foot, followed by a light one, on the stairs, and the portière raised and admitted big, burly Mark Featherstone, followed by a tall, dark, bright-eyed youth, John Langdon Orme.

Mark bent over his wife in her downy basket nest. Lynette sprang forward into the embrace of two rough, blue pilot-cloth-coated arms, and pretty Lady Mildred looked down on them all from her canvas with her languishing blue eyes, a world of cynical meaning in the eternal simper of her painted lips.

Mr. and Mrs. Langdon-Orme were at home. The flag floating from the keep of Ormescliffe Castle proclaimed the fact to a gratified county. During John's long minority the place had been let to an unpopular, disreputable family, whose departure was viewed with much content, giving place, as they did, to a bright, genial young couple, with light hearts, and a pocketful of money to spend between them.

They soon hit on a very promising way of ridding themselves of a portion of their burden of riches. Ormescliffe Castle was a wonderful and imposing structure, once a stronghold of some importance; then a priory, and lastly the residence of a fine old English gentleman with a taste for classic architecture and Italian gardens.

There was a magnificent opening for artistic restoration, the only difficulty being where to begin. By way of a practical commencement, they had turned an eminent London architect (Murgatroyd, R.A., a recognised authority on mediæval art) loose in the great banquetting hall—a sort of apartment suited for a coronation or an agricultural show, hardly for the daily needs of an English gentleman's household.

"I'm afraid it will take all our lives and all our money before it can be finished," John admitted. "In fact Lynette thinks we had better stop and begin with the rooms we really want at once. Lynette is always so practical and prudent."



Lola was accustomed to being the recipient of similar remarks from one or the other of the devoted young couple, so she merely signified assent, and he set off again.

"She looked so handsome, too, last night, didn't she? Not a woman to compare with her. Old Lord Bilberry said so. The best dancer, and out-and-out the prettiest woman. I heard him—I beg your pardon, Lola, of course *you* were there; but you know Lynette is younger, and—and ——" John's sentence trailed off lamely; but Lola was no whit discomfited.

"Lord Bilberry is an old noodle, and as blind as you are, John. Lady Muriel Banks and I are both better looking than Lynette, and I was immeasurably the best dressed of the three. It would have been a want of proper feeling on your part to have noticed it, though."

John looked unconvinced. He went on:

"I came to ask you a great favour. I am obliged to go up to town to-day. A man has a schooner yacht to sell, and perhaps Lynette may like it better than the *Preciosa*. *Won't* you go to Ormescliffe, and keep her company? I wanted her to come here, but she wouldn't, and I can't bear to think of her all alone up there."

"Very well," agreed Mrs. Featherstone; "but when am I to go, and how long am I to stay?"

"I haven't told her, lest she should build upon it and be disappointed; but I mean to try and get back to dinner. Don't tell her so, for I might not manage it. If not, I'll come by the early train to-morrow."

Lola's eyes gleamed with lazy amusement.

"I'll take care to raise no false hopes," she said. "Must you go now? Good bye."

She watched him ride away down the long beech avenue, made some necessary arrangements for her day and night's absence from home, wrote a line to Mark, bidding him join her at Ormescliffe, and was dressing for her drive there, when she beheld a pair of pretty chestnut ponies trotting briskly up to the house, driven by a slight blue figure in rather reckless fashion. Two minutes later Lynette tripped in.

"Coming to me, were you? That's very kind of you; but John might have known his wish is law to me, and that of course *I* should come *here*, as he suggested it."

"Whatever you both like best," said Lola, serenely submitting, as usual, to be the shuttlecock of this impulsive young couple's arrangements.

"Well, as you are ready, come along, and I'll drive you," Lynette decided, and they started. Lynette had certainly improved with marriage; grown rounder and softer in outline, placider in manner and gentler in speech. But to-day there was a ruffled look on her face, and a sharp tone in her voice that made Lola look at her once or twice during the drive in mild interrogation.

Featherstonehope lay in a wooded valley, sunny and sheltered; Ormescliffe Castle on the hill above it, looking seaward. Beneath it lay St. Bride's Haven, with a tiny fleet of red-sailed fishing vessels dancing on the waters just outside, and Lynette's graceful rival, the *Preciosa* moored alongside a little rocky pier, from which a flight of rough steps climbed up the face of the cliff to the castle. One horn of the little bay was formed by a low headland, on which stood St. Bride's church, long ago disused, but containing the burying places of most of the old families around. The air blew fresh and keen as Lynette's ponies trotted up the ascent that curved round the hill, giving constantly-changing views of the mighty walls and towers above. Finally, it led direct to the obnoxious South Front, with its pillored portico and terrace. Lynette eyed the range of windows, all of a size and one-third blank, with their striped blinds, and the geraniums in the vases, that decorated the terrace balustrade with high disfavour.

"Isn't it hideously cockney? Think of having to live a day longer than one can help in a place like that! Only fit for kitchens and servants' rooms."

"You are very comfortably lodged there, I think," said Lola; "and I believe the Caringhams made the rooms look very handsome; but of course *we* never saw the place in their time."

"What *did* they do to be sent to Coventry by everyone?" Lynette asked, carelessly.

"*Everything*," replied Lola, emphatically. "The men were disreputable, but the women were worse, and Lady Mildred wanted to cultivate them! Fancy Mark's feelings. I'm glad he never gave in to her."

Lynette dropped the subject. Her thoughts were evidently pre-occupied, and disagreeably so. Lola good-naturedly did her languid best to divert her, but in vain. She suggested a walk. Lynette was tired. That they should pay some calls after luncheon. Lynette didn't care to go without John. Finally, heroically subduing her own feelings, she expressed a desire to see how the restorations were going on. Lynette brightened for a moment.

"The Banqueting Hall will be done next week, as far as we mean to go. The pictures are home again, ready to go up, and we have *nearly* decided on the fire shovel. The designs for the poker and tongs came yesterday. So much depends on detail," Lynette sighed; "and John's idea was to get the fireplace complete first, as it is a feature and a necessary. Chairs and tables can wait—besides, I'm tired of it all!"

Lola raised her eyebrows slightly.

"I'm longing to get to our own part, where we are to live. Nearly everything is settled, and John and I were to have gone over the last few rooms to-day with Mr. Murgatroyd's pupil, Mr. Bell, who is down here, so that everything might be settled this week; and now this horrid yacht comes in the way and wastes two days!"

Lynette pushed her plate from her impatiently. "I offered to go over them myself, but John wouldn't hear of it; declared I must *not*. They are the rooms he had when he came home from college and the Caringshams left, and he says he won't let Mr. Bell overhaul the place without him."

"Never mind; let us see the great hall," said peace-making Lola; "John must have some good reason."

"He says the staircase is unsafe; but I don't believe it," Lynette answered, rebelliously. Lola declined further discussion, and followed her silently from the inhabited south front to the central part of the building, where a noise of hammering and sawing, of workmen's tramping feet and gruff voices, indicated the scene of the restorations. Lynette opened a door, and they found themselves in a great vaulted space, big enough for a cathedral, where the workmen looked like so many bees as they swarmed on high scaffoldings, toiled with their loads up and down tall ladders, or clung about the clustered capitals of the pillars. The fireplace, in which an ox might almost have been roasted whole, was indeed a feature, and seated in its cavernous depths, carefully copying a piece of old iron work, was a young man in a dusty velvet coat, with dishevelled hair. He rose and came forward as they entered.

"May I ask, has Mr. Orme decided about those rooms?"

"Not yet," answered Lynette, hesitatingly.

"I have just had a telegram from Mr. Murgatroyd. He hopes to get down here to-night, and I should have liked to be in readiness for him," said the young fellow, with a dissatisfied air.

"I will see what I can do," replied Lynette, hurriedly. "Do you mind coming back, Lola." Lola did not object. "Send Mrs. Wygram to me," Lynette said to a servant they passed on their way back to the pretty morning-room.

A sedate, motherly woman in black silk appeared.

"I want the keys of the North Tower, Mrs. Wygram."

"Yes, madam; I will bring them directly; all but the key of the Red Room, as we used to call it. Mr. Orme keeps that himself."

"Ah, then, I can get it; I shall not want the rest."

The good woman looked disturbed.

"I do hope, madam, you will excuse me—but you won't think of going there yourself?"

"Why not?" asked Lynette, imperiously.

"Mr. Orme's orders were imperative that no one should attempt to go there. They aren't safe, indeed, madam."

"I shall do as I think fit," was all the reply vouchsafed to Mrs. Wygram, who withdrew, looking unutterable things.

"Don't be a goose, Lynette," began Lola—to empty air, for Lynette had fled. Up the stairs, through her own room to John's dressing-room ran the naughty girl. There stood John's mighty old-fashioned bureau, with its drawers and pigeon-holes and sliding

panels. Lynette had the keys of them all. Her courage cooled as she peeped and pried, first in one place and then in another, and she was just prepared to give up her disobedient project when she came upon the key. It was a big rusty affair, labelled and wrapped in one of John's silk handkerchiefs, with two smaller ones. She seized the bundle and ran, without giving herself time to think.

Back across the broad landing she sped, down a long dark corridor, through a locked door of an unused room, and so through a boarded opening into the dilapidated central pile. She was in a sort of gallery, giving glimpses of the sea through arched openings, ending in the spiral staircase of the North Tower.

She paused for a moment before ascending to look askance down the deep gloomy shaft which ended, she knew, in a door opening on the face of the cliff many feet below; then lightly ran up to a landing, from which one door opened. The key turned easily in the lock, and she flung open the door of a silent, mouldy-smelling chamber, lighted by a stream of dusty sunlight pouring in through an uncleaned lattice window.

There was not much for it to shine on. A tall and gaunt bedstead, stripped of hangings and bedding, an empty wardrobe with half-shut drawers, a toilet table, the glass dim with a veil of dust, and a green mass that once had been a candle-end in one of the sockets. That was all, except a print of John's college over the mantelpiece. Nothing alarming, and yet Lynette felt scared and uncomfortable. She made a pretence to herself of being busy, lifted daintily her pretty gown from contact with the floor, and paced the room carefully. "Fifteen feet; a very good length. We might make it to open on the North Corridor, I should think. Now for the width."

The room was panelled in a pinky grey, with brown mouldings. The panels were of all shapes and sizes, so she was hardly surprised, after pacing across from the door by which she had entered, to find herself in front of a second. The light streamed through its keyhole and caught her attention. She stood irresolute for a moment, and then tried one of the two remaining keys, a small steel one, that looked as if it might belong to a patent lock; the third key was a tiny gold or gilded toy. The door creaked stiffly and ominously, Lynette thought.

She might as well go on, however. It was only a large, light closet after all. Just big enough to hold a chair and a table, over which hung a portrait. Ah!

A portrait, evidently an enlarged and tinted photograph of a beautiful, smiling woman in a fantastic dress, looking straight at Lynette with bold, triumphant eyes; eyes that she knew too well, poor child: the eyes of Lady Mildred. She sat shivering and bewildered in the dusty velvet chair, looking at them in return with a face of piteous enquiry. The table underneath held a vase, and a large casket of gold and enamel of exquisite foreign workmanship.

Still looking into the cruel blue eyes of her rival, Lynette rose, and mechanically fitting the tiny gold key into the lock, turned it, and raised the lid. A strong, rich perfume still hung about the quilted satin lining; within were some few letters tied with a blue ribbon. Lynette touched them with aversion, and dropped them as her eyes caught some of the words, scrawled in an untidy, school-girl hand on the most gorgeous of note-paper. A long, soft lock of red-brown hair lay beneath them and a tiny velvet shoe.

She looked no farther, but, closing the lid with a bang, flung herself on the floor, crying angrily, miserably, hopelessly. The sun got round to her window, and passed it before she could check the storm of jealous despair that possessed her. She raised herself at last all tear-stained and soiled, and looked at her pretty slender hand with four cruel little wounds where she had bitten it to prevent herself shrieking or going into hysterics.

"What will John say?" she thought. "John? I can *never* see him again. I would *die* sooner."

She was not to be allowed the choice, however, and rose weary and spent with passion. Lady Mildred's cruel eyes followed her to the door. She locked it, and then the door of the bed-room, and slowly and painfully made her way down the dusky stairs. Her dress caught somehow, her foot slipped, and she fell heavily forward against the rotting banister. It cracked under her weight, gave way, and fell crashing down some thirty feet into the darkness, while she saved herself by a sudden jerk and grasp at a sounder part of the rail. She was not to be taken at her rash word, and sick and giddy she crept down the rest of the stairs. A splinter of wood had torn her hand, though she did not notice it, and the blood dropped on her gown and the handkerchief that held the keys when she stooped to pick it up. She sped on to the inhabited part of the house, hoping to gain her room unobserved.

"Lynette! Where are you?" she heard Lola calling. "Here is John coming home, Lynette!"

Lynette rushed to replace the keys in the bureau, then to her room, where she came full upon astonished Lola in search of her.

No wonder Lola opened her fine eyes. Lynette's pretty blue gown was smirched and blood-spotted, her hair dusty and dishevelled, her cheeks flushed and tear-streaked. But Lola had the gift of accepting a situation without needless comment, and when Lynette gasped, "John coming! Oh, help me!" instead of exclaiming or ringing for the maid, she tore off the soiled gown, and thrust it out of sight, poured out a basinfull of cold water with a dash of eau-de-cologne in it, and brushed and knotted up the fleece of light hair that fell over her sister's shoulders, then placed herself coolly at the window to report events.

"I made John out with a field-glass coming down the hill from the station," she said, "and Mark's dog-cart on the Featherstonhope



road. Yes; there's John just coming out of the shrubbery; he is taking the short cut."

Lynette finished bathing her face, and looked up wildly. "What can I do? What will he say?"

"You had better dress for dinner at once," said Lola, calmly. "Let me get your gown out. The black Spanish lace? Yes; while you do your hair properly. John is coming over the field now, and someone after him."

"Oh, who is it? and where is Mark? He *ought* to overtake John."

"I can't see. A flock of sheep on the road are raising such a cloud of dust. Ah! there is the dog-cart; John will be here first, though."

"Oh, look again, Lola, do! Is no one else coming?" said Lynette, clasping on her amber necklace in frantic haste.

"Yes; the other man, Mr. Murgatroyd. I know his buff overcoat. He will soon be up to John. Let me put your roses on for you. What an exquisite Marshal Niel!"

"There, there! Tell me where they are now."

"Just at the door, all together."

"Lynette! Lynette!" sounded through the hall in John's cheery tenor.

"Run down, dear, if you wish to meet him before Mark and Mr. Murgatroyd come in."

"But I don't!" cried Lynette, desperately.

There was a sound of many voices and greetings in the hall below, and Lynette swept down the staircase to meet her husband with the decorum made obligatory by the presence of others, while Lola, wondering greatly, departed to dress as the first dinner-bell was clanging noisily from the turret above.

She wondered more at dinner: Lynette sat between Mark and the eminent R.A., talking, laughing, and looking prettier than her sister had ever imagined possible. John was unusually silent, and once when the north rooms were mentioned shot a questioning glance at the sisters, unnoticed by his wife, and received with serene incomprehension by Mrs. Featherstone.

Lynette was silent and moody in the drawing-room alone with her sister.

"Lola," she asked, suddenly, "tell me about Lady Mildred. You promised you would once."

Lola looked perplexed.

"It's not an edifying story, dear. She married Mark for his money. She told him so afterwards, and made herself as uncomfortable a wife as a man could have: fast, extravagant, bad-tempered. She had a sort of way with her that men admired, and she gave out that Mark was very hard on her. I believe she flirted to the verge of impropriety, but *did* manage to stop there; at least, there never was any actual scandal against her, till she died."

"Then there *was* a story?" demanded Lynette, her face concealed by her fan.

"Only suppositious at most. Mark was in Paris when the old butler wrote to him to come back at once. He did so, and found her ill with what proved to be typhus fever. He nursed her, let no one go near her but the London nurse besides himself. She died a week after, quite unconscious. She said queer things in her delirium, and servants have ears and will talk; besides, the butler's letter was written *before* her illness was known. Her trunks were all packed, her maid did not know why; and a letter or two came to the house for her that Mark read and burned on the spot. He is very unforgiving, is Mark. He would not let her be buried with his people in Featherstone church, but at midnight she was carried out to the vault in St. Bride's, with no one but Mark to follow her."

Lynette looked gloomily across the bay to the headland, dark against the moonlit sea, where the ruined church still stood; a landmark for the fishermen. "Who was *he*?" she asked presently in a dry, cracked voice.

"Some young fellow with lots of money, younger than herself. I only know from chance gossip. No one ever heard the whole story."

"Good night, Lola," and Lynette sprang up hurriedly. "Ask them to excuse me. My head is aching miserably, and Mr. Murgatroyd will want to play billiards half the night." Lola kissed her fondly, and saw her depart with dire misgivings.

"I must speak to John before I sleep," Lynette was saying to herself. "He suspects something; I know his face so well. He has seen the keys. Oh, I must hear the full truth now, but it will kill me," she sobbed.

She had dismissed her maid, and, wrapped in her dressing-gown, sat trembling in the moon-light awaiting John's coming. She heard him stirring softly, she fancied, in his dressing-room, but he never came. Midnight came and passed. One clanged from the clock tower, then two. Lynette started from an uneasy doze. Her room was in darkness, the house sunk in tomb-like stillness. Where was John? She listened at his door, then entered softly. Silence and emptiness. No trace of him, except that from his window she could see across the great black mass of building a glimmering light. It shone from the blue chamber in the deserted north tower. She was too crushed and hopeless to weep again. She could only give a faint protesting little moan, and sink into her chair and sleep. Such sleep! More painful and wearying than hours of watching. Such dreams! playing with her great misery as with a toy, showing it to her now in one light, now in another; now as a jest, now as a dread, formless, over-shadowing horror. She was laughing, crying, dancing, dressing, going through scene after scene, fantastic or commonplace, but always alone. There was no John in the world; and

she woke with a bitter cry to find her head resting on his shoulder and his arm round her waist.

"Oh! John, my John, *what* do I care if you have had a hundred Lady Mildreds for your first loves, if you will but keep *me* your last!"

"Why, you are dreaming, my poor little darling," said John, laughing; "and no wonder! I thought you were in bed hours ago, when I listened at the door and found all still and dark."

Lynette roused herself to look at him by the grey light of the morning. He was in a rough yachting suit, his shoulders were dusty, and his hands smoked and grimy. "I've had a dirty job to do," he said, apologetically, "and it had to be finished to-night. I never thought I should be so long about it, though. I say, Lynette, I'm awfully hungry, and I don't know how to get any breakfast except by going down to the yacht for it."

"*Do*," cried Lynette, "and take me. I sha'n't sleep any more this morning."

John departed to "clean himself," while Lynette hurried into a blue serge dress, and was ready as soon as he was. They stole out of their rooms and down the corridor to the forbidden region. Lynette shuddered as they came upon the staircase with its broken rail. A rush of cold air and grey light came up from somewhere below, and the head of John's factotum, the steward of the *Preciosa*, was seen ascending to their level.

"I've brought the boat round, sir."

"Got the cord and weights?"

"Here, sir."

"All right. Wait here till I call you. Will you come with me for a minute or two, dear? The stair is quite safe close to the wall."

He helped her up, testing carefully each step with his own full weight before he let her venture on it.

"Did you know I had been here before, John?" she took courage to whisper.

"I guessed it; look here," and he opened his hand, showing the tiny gold key. "I found this, all messed with blood, where you had dropped it, and that told the story."

"Were you angry?"

"Angry? My darling! As if I had room in my heart for anything but thankfulness that you were saved to me," and he stopped to give her a mighty hug.

The Blue Room door stood open. A tremendous litter was on the hearth; blackened scraps of paper, pieces of broken glass, and a particularly evil smell was in the air. Lynette turned pale, and sat down on the first chair, and John cleared his throat, and seemed singularly wanting in his accustomed readiness of speech.

"You see, dear—I ought to tell you everything, you know. It's a nasty story—I didn't care to bother you with it before I

could help—but Murgatroyd coming, you see.” Here John ran aground.

“About Lady Mildred?” suggested Lynette, in a hard, forced little voice.

“Exactly so,” said John, floated off again. “I knew her, you see, when I was home for the holidays, and thought no end of her. She was so sweet, so gracious, so unhappy. Something between a queen and a saint in my very juvenile eyes. I made up lots of romances about her, till one day, when they all broke down. I was here a good deal. Spencer Caringham and I were school friends, and one Easter I found Ponsonby Caringham, the eldest son, at home—an awful scamp he was. Spencer told me no end of queer stories about his brother, and one day one about Lady Mildred, for which I gave the poor little beggar a licking there and then. That night, however, Ponsonby tried to get me to take a note to Featherstonehope, and then I saw it was all true, and went back to school disgusted, and believing all things against all women—except always my own little sweetheart. Then I heard of her death, and that she was to be buried like a pauper or a suicide! I don’t know what put the romantic notion into my head that I, at least, would show her honour, and I got away unobserved, caught a night train, and arrived at St. Bride’s church just in time to see Mark Featherstone leaving.

“The vault was already boarded up. I had brought a wreath of white flowers, so I just laid it at the closed door and was going, when I came full on Ponsonby Caringham looking like a ghost in the moonlight. He went on like a madman, raved, and tried to tear down the boarding of the vault, and at last flung himself on the grass before it, crying like a child. ‘Did you bring that, Orme?’ he asked, pointing to the wreath. ‘You are a good little fellow. She always liked you.’ I got away from him at last, and back without detection. Some time after I got a letter from Ponsonby, enclosing two keys. He was going abroad, into the Turkish service, and he left these rooms in my care, begging me to destroy his treasured relics when occasion required. And a tough job it has been,” ended John, stretching himself. “A whole case filled with things under that table, and a portrait and letters. I burned and smashed all I could, and now I’m going to drown the rest before we go to the yacht. Hullo, Duncan!”

The grizzled head of the old sailor appeared in the doorway in answer to the call. “Just fasten up and weight that, will you,” pointing to a canvas-covered bundle on the floor. “Now, Lynette.”

They made their way in shy silence down the treacherous staircase to its lowest depth, where a door opened out on the face of the cliff. There was a path, and some rocky steps down to the harbour where the yacht’s boat was in waiting. “Do you see that big rock

just under St. Bride's church?" John said. "They say there is a fathomless depth of water there."

John took the oars, and Lynette steered carefully out to the rocky headland. The cliffs rose black and grim, there was a great silence on the grey, cold sea, and she shivered as she took the oars while John lifted the heavy bundle and lowered it over the side as gently as he could. Down, down it went into the cold, dark water, with a sullen splash and a whirl of foam-bells; and the boat, after one great rock, shot out merrily from the chill shadow into the first rays of the level sun. Lynette's heart gave one great bound in accord. John's kind eyes were smiling on her, the last vestige of her folly at the bottom of the sea, the world all fresh and glowing in the warm beams of the new day's sun. Was there ever such a happy little woman since the first sun shone?

Lola looked from her window an hour or two later.

"Why, Mark! I might have spared you and myself a night's anxiety about those young people. Look over there. If they haven't been out boating before breakfast!—Oh, Mark, I wonder," sighed Lola, stirred for a moment out of her satisfied repose, "if you and I were as young, should we be as blissfully foolish as they are?"

"I don't know that we should," replied Mark, prosaically. "But they may think themselves lucky when they are as old as we are if they are half as happy!"



#### AD CUPIDINEM.

O Love, Love, Love! why come you again to me  
With the glamour of olden days and the promise that may not be?  
Leave me, I pray you, leave me, a waif on a sunless sea!

O Love, Love, Love! you have sweet, soft words and ways,  
And ever a glory of summer around your pathway plays—  
Leave me, I pray you, leave me to my drear November days!

O Love, Love, Love! I have given you all my heart,  
And my thoughts are full of sorrow, and tears to my eyes will start—  
Ah, take me not at my word, child!—I die if you depart!

J. H. D.







R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"HERE THEY COME," SAID ANNE, POINTING TO SOME MEN STRAGGLING HOME FROM THE POOL.

M. ELLEN STAPLES.

THE